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THE ENGLISH NOVELISTS

SIR WALTER SCOTT

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SIR WALTER SCOTT

by

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From an obituary notice written in 1832 :

“ Fear not, worthy member of the world-to-be, that Sir Walter Scott will be forgotten. Old castles may fall into decay, but monuments like *Waverley*, *Ivanhoe*, *Kenilworth* and *Old Mortality* are more enduring than granite feet through.”



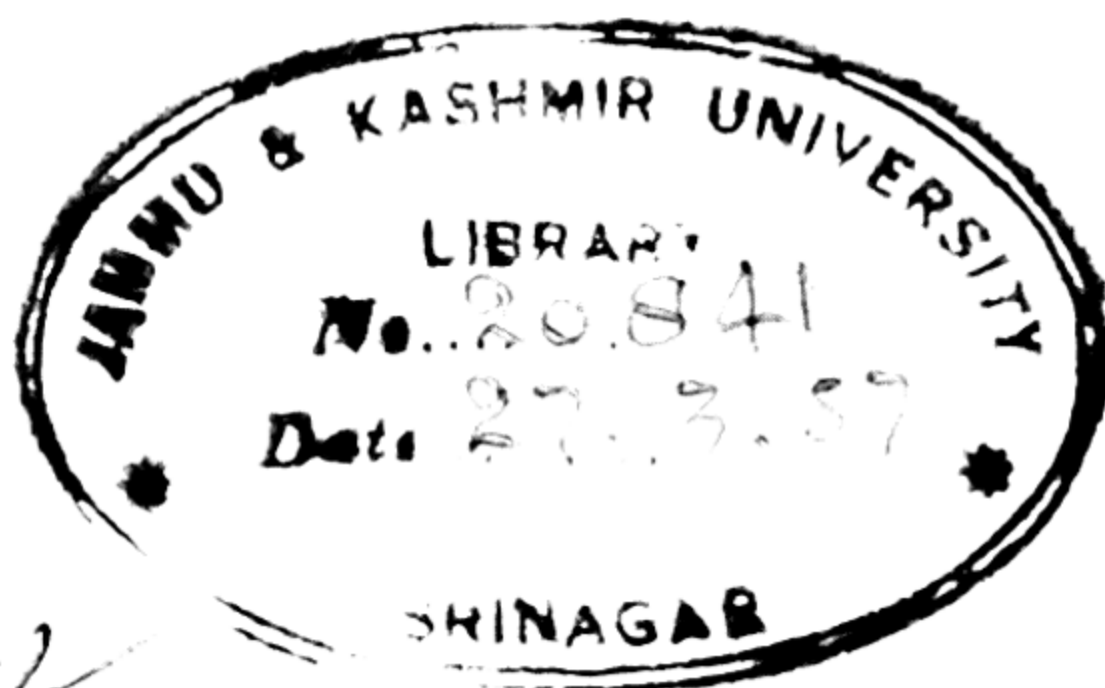
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BIOGRAPHICAL DATES

- 1771. Birth at Edinburgh.
- 1779. High School, Edinburgh.
- 1784. Enrolled Edinburgh University.
- 1786. Enters his father's office as apprentice attorney.
- 1788-92. Classes in Law, Edinburgh University.
- 1792. Admitted to Bar as an advocate.
- 1796. Publishes translations of ballads by Bürger.
- 1797. Marriage to Charlotte Charpentier. Move to Lasswade.
- 1799. Sheriff-Depute of Selkirkshire.
- 1800. *The Eve of St. John.*
- 1802. *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border.*
- 1804. *Sir Tristrem.* Move from Lasswade to Ashestiel.
- 1805. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.* Partnership with Ballantyne.
- 1806. Appointed Clerk of Session. *Ballads and Lyrical Pieces.*
- 1808. *Marmion.* Portrait painted by Raeburn.
- 1810. *The Lady of the Lake.*
- 1811. *Rokeby, The Vision of Don Roderick.* Purchase of Cartley Farm.
- 1812. Move to Abbotsford.
- 1813. Declines Laureateship. *The Bridal of Triermain.*
- 1814. *Waverley. The Border Antiquities of England and Scotland.*
- 1815. *Lord of the Isles. Guy Mannering.* Visit to Brussels and Paris. *The Field of Waterloo.*
- 1816. *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk. The Antiquary. Old Mortality. The Black Dwarf.*

1817. *Rob Roy. Harold the Dauntless.*
1818. *Heart of Midlothian.*
1819. *The Bride of Lammermoor. The Legend of Montrose.*
1820. *Ivanhoe. The Monastery. The Abbot. Baronetcy conferred by the Regent.*
1821. *Kenilworth. The Pirate.*
1822. *The Fortunes of Nigel.*
1823. *Peveril of the Peak. Quentin Durward. St. Ronan's Well.*
1824. *Redgauntlet.*
1825. *The Betrothed. The Talisman. Threat of insolvency.*
1826. *Woodstock. Death of Lady Scott. Bankruptcy.*
1827. *The Highland Widow. The Two Drovers. The Fair Maid of Perth. The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte (in nine volumes).*
- 1828-30. *History of Scotland (to 1745).*
1829. *Anne of Geierstein.*
1832. *Count Robert of Paris. Castle Dangerous.*
1832. *Death of Sir Walter Scott at Abbotsford.*

THE MAN

I

SIR WALTER SCOTT occupies a highly important niche in our temple of literature, for, as prime architect of the popular historical romance, he initiated a new era in story-telling.) Up till his day all the great English novels had been studies in contemporary life. Sir Walter, owing to the innate magic with which he had come into the world endowed, seemed to eliminate the time factor and make all life contemporary. | For him the past, often by virtue of some chance revelation or contact, ceased to be the past, and became in his consciousness as immediate as the present. From inanimate things he involuntarily drew life, passion, romantic visions, the actual vibration of events. For him dry bones re-assembled themselves and became clothed in flesh, and rubble reconstituted itself into settings for pageantry.) From time to time some visual impact made so startling an impression on his sensibility that he would fall into a trance—as for example the sight of the blood-stained shirt in which Sir Henry Slingsby had been executed, or the occasion of the first exposition of the Scottish Regalia. Automatically in him the past was re-born, re-animated, re-realised, and ceased in any dry-as-dust sense to be history.

It is a truism to say that the knowledge and appreciation we bring to objects and scenes enhance their value to us, but we have not all got the faculty, it is a rare one, of suffusing those things of which we take cognisance with our own

emotions. Sir Walter had this faculty in the acutest degree, as well as the imperative urge to share his perceptions with the world, which involved translating them into a medium that could readily be apprehended by everyone. Some years before publishing any novel himself, he edited and completed Joseph Strutt's historical romance *Queenhoo Hall*, laid in the reign of Henry VI, the language of which was precisely archaic and the descriptions exactingly antiquarian. Scott instinctively found fault with Strutt's fidelity to period. For one thing it made the book difficult to read and, for another, it seemed to him to furnish no common ground of understanding between the author and his public. From working on this romance, the editor became convinced that a story designed for amusement must be expressed in language approximating to common speech so that it might be easily understood by the average reader. Though, as we shall see, Scott often made use of a kind of antique or obsolescent jargon himself, he was always careful not to make Strutt's mistake of being over-accurate. Better far, he decided, to err on the side of colloquiality than on that of correctitude ; better, too, to invent your hero rather than to challenge criticism by adopting a world-famous figure as the pivot on which the story is to turn.

(It is interesting at this point to note that when Scott came to composing historical novels himself, his instinctive judgement prevented him from making an historic personage the principal character in any book. It is *Waverley*, not Prince Charlie ; it is *Ivanhoe*, not Richard Coeur de Lion ; it is *Amy Robsart*, not Queen Elizabeth ; it is *Quentin Durward*, not Louis XI ; it is the *Abbot*, not Mary Queen of Scots, on whom the story depends.)

As the delineation or picturing of an epoch is his aim, to

this end he subordinates all sentimental interests. In the pageant novels, for instance, young lovers are but supplementary to his scheme of presentation, though they often serve the useful purpose of linking scenes together. The part played by Margaret Ramsay in *The Fortunes of Nigel* is a good example of Scott's method of articulating his narrative. And just because the chief interest of the novels does not lie in the passionate intrigues of young persons of opposite sex, the historical element automatically takes pride of place. If we were asked to define wherein lies the great novelty and distinction of romances of this type, must we not admit that it is because they deal with general interests, public passions and concerns—in short, with the drama of an epoch or a nation?

It is clear, of course, that this tentative appreciation can only be applied to romances in Scott's grand manner, of which *Ivanhoe*, *Quentin Durward* and *Kenilworth* are typical examples. It cannot be applied to those novels of direct experience, such as *St. Ronan's Well* or *Guy Mannering*, which have their own particular tale to tell and must be assessed in quite another way.

No one who in early youth was persuaded by Sir Walter Scott to enter the enchanted preserves of history by way of the Plessis drawbridge or the Ashby tournament will, in later life, wish to criticise the author of these romances either for his inaccuracies or his anachronisms. The details and dates were not important to us then and, as we grow older and realise how few are the story-books that illuminate for us the tenebrous past, they remain relatively, if not entirely, unimportant. Who else but Sir Walter Scott, writing a tale of the twelfth, fifteenth or sixteenth century, could have produced a setting that is always rather more

than less right and people it with characters that have their proper being as truly as do our contemporaries? A novelist, after all, is not a chronicler, and even a tale may impart knowledge, to say nothing of a Shakespearian play. Scott had a way of countering all criticism from more meticulous historians by asking, "Did not the great Duke of Marlborough once admit that Shakespeare's historical plays were the only English history he had read in his life? And though I myself am but a pigmy in comparison, might I not also serve the purpose of interesting people in history?"

It is said freely to-day that the Waverley Novels now lie neglected on their shelves since they have fallen out of favour with the common reader. If this, in fact, be the case it may be instructive to enquire why such a fate should have overtaken them when the works of Jane Austen, the Brontës, Dickens, Trollope and Thackeray seem unaffected by the passing of the years and still make a lively appeal to readers young and old. Can it be that the modern reader is no longer curious to dabble in the historic past, or that being struck by the essential artificiality of the build-up of the historical novel in general he shrinks from tackling it?

Enquiries of this nature may provoke a variety of surmises. Some would hazard that the changed tempo of living and the elimination of the time factor in news dealing with quotidian affairs have contributed to make the slowly developing tale of adventure tedious, or, indeed, that the presentation of historical scenes on the screen have made printed descriptions of an imaginary archaeologist's world appear cumbrous and unreal. But it is difficult to believe that it is for obvious claims of this kind that Scott has been deserted while other authors have held their own against time, speed and the cinema studio. Perhaps there is a

subtler cause : perhaps Scottish idolators may be held in part responsible for the neglect that has overtaken their idol, for have they not deliberately chosen to smother a really versatile genius of "irritable and most ungovernable mind" with a plaster mould of placid amiability? Have they not compressed and glozed the great artist into the model man we see ruminating under his Gothic extinguisher in Edinburgh?

Hugh Walpole once said that the people who cared most for Sir Walter Scott were elderly clergymen, lawyers, schoolmasters and provincial ladies, whose supreme interest lay in discovering Scott's moral grit and uprightness rather than in appraising or even enjoying his bookmanship, the kind of people, in short, who in their heart of hearts would prefer the pedestrian narrative of *The Journal* to all the imaginative works. In this connection it is germane to note that Scottish writers on Scott always show a distinct preference for what in Sir Walter's day were known as "The Scotch Novels." This may perhaps be accounted for by the fact that they display an intense degree of interest in morality, a quality in which the masque or pageant novels were found to be comparatively deficient. Articles written for magazines in Scott's day frequently contrast the excellence of the morality in the first category with the degree of weakness or wickedness common to the rest.

Sir Walter has been lauded more than any other novelist, save Charles Dickens, for his ethical qualities, and the young as well as many of their elders recoil almost automatically nowadays from old-fashioned precepts of perfection. We all have our own moral problems and do not look to any romancer for their solution. We do not find it interesting to be told that Scott was good, brave or honest, for such

endowments cannot be regarded as peculiar to himself nor as subjected by him to original treatment. And in no way do these qualifications explain for us his genius, his method of achieving his vast success, or the power he wielded over his contemporaries.

In the meridian of his career Sir Walter Scott was a tremendous figure—the most renowned writer of his age. The impatience with which his new tales were awaited in the United States was such that the first sheets of each romance were rushed into print in Philadelphia while the last sheets were being hot-pressed in Edinburgh. So eager indeed were Americans to devour each fresh work that the first batch of two thousand copies had to be galloped by postal relay from Philadelphia to New York, thirty-six hours after the last sheet had reached the printers' hands. In all civilised lands it was an exciting event when one of Sir Walter's novels was published. In Vienna, Paris and St. Petersburg his books were at one time all the rage. (Heine tells us that in Berlin everyone went to bed with *Waverley* under the pillow and read *Rob Roy* sipping the morning chocolate. For every Scottish admirer in his own day, Sir Walter must have had a hundred or more readers who were not Scots. How comes it that no longer is he, as in former times, admired as an international artist and producer, but has sunk to being one of Scotland's domestic gods, a mascot, as it were, of Scottish sentiment. He would have hated this transmutation for, as we outsiders know, he was more than a narrow Scotsman in so far as by instinctive genius and application he became a denizen of that All-Men's-Land of memories and shades—the Border. And spiritually he was even more than that, since his sympathies were commensurate with his colossal reputation.

If it is still possible to present Sir Walter to the public from a new angle by approaching him directly in his works and not as a conventionalised and built-up celebrity, may he not emerge from the process with a fresh and different halo? If ever a writer was entitled to a halo it is he, not because he was a saint, but because he was a genius. In making any experiment of re-assessment we should, to begin with, clear from the dark memorial corners of our minds the cobwebs with which they are liable to become festooned. We should jettison the belief, held by many who have discoursed on Scott, that he wrote his first published novels in from three to six weeks, we should reject the idea that his career as an author was an orderly progression from ballad to narrative poem or that his novels grew out of his narrative poems. We should admit that, coming late on the scene, Lockhart accepted the Scott who had traditionalised himself. (Out of sheer sense of fun and enjoyment Scott not only thought of himself as several people, but invented legends and episodes designed to illustrate the variety and fertility of his own imagination.) And, in addition, we have it on Sir Herbert Grierson's authority that in writing his great biography, Lockhart "manipulated dates as well as texts of letters." In re-reading this famous *Life* (while reviewing volume by volume the huge collection of *Letters* edited by Sir Herbert) one got the clear impression that the author was slightly apprehensive lest future generations might discount his advocacy. Beneath the magnificent monument designed by his son-in-law, Sir Walter has lain in urbane dignity. Perhaps it is time that he rose from the tomb and re-assumed some of the characteristics of which Lockhart in his protective love divested him.

II

To begin with, we must never lose sight of the fact that Lockhart was to some extent handicapped by knowing nothing at first hand of the origin or the courtship of Charlotte Charpentier, which, as we shall presently see, forms so important a clue in the creation and development of some of Scott's earlier novels. Scott never talked of those days, and it would have taken a more imaginative man than Lockhart to see in his fat and ageing mother-in-law the sprightly sylph who taught Wattie how to love and inspired in him a passionate devotion. Lady Scott did not like Sophia's husband much and he was at no time interested in her. They could not get the best out of each other, and even Scott himself had come to regard her as part of his setting. And there is one other point we should not forget, which is that Lockhart, like many people of his day, thought it added to Sir Walter's reputation to represent him in his invented role of lightning worker. Let us not be surprised that some of the circumstantial stories handed on by him may have emanated from Scott himself—the writing, for example, of *Waverley* against time in June 1814 or the midnight drive to Polton at the moment of the financial crash, in which Sir Herbert Grierson finds it impossible to believe. Let us admit, too, that in Lockhart's most resolute and capable hands the perceptive genius, the bookish Borderer racy of the soil, the hard-working professional man, became the victim of the gentlemanly tradition.

Can it be that posthumous canonisation killed enthusiasm for, and interest in, the Scott novels? It is not advantageous

to anyone's reputation to be turned into a plaster saint. When alive, Scott, though enormously successful, was not regarded as a sacrosanct figure but, like other authors, was often the target of attack and the centre of controversy and curiosity. Some critics praised his work extravagantly ; some said the books were strangely unequal in merit, others that there were too many of them. On my bookshelves are three bound volumes of contemporary reviews of his novels, which go to show that except for the always subservient *Quarterly*, in which he once, at least, wrote a favourable article on his own tales, he was treated like other writers. The author was sometimes counselled to be less hasty in publishing, and not to purchase a pottle of land at the expense of a pottle of reputation. Sometimes the provincial language he indulged in would be carped at. "A glossary," they would say, "should be provided, for to grapple with the dark dialect of Anglified Erse is indeed a labour." In commenting on *The Talisman* and *The Betrothed* it was suggested that "the author of *Waverley* was writing himself down."

Some critics observed that it would take most writers longer to copy a manuscript than it took the author of *Waverley* to compose a new work. Everyone seems to have scented that there was something very odd indeed about his rate of production ; but no one hit on what it was, and some suggested that the name might cover the work of a syndicate. In the pages of *Blackwood's* an anonymous writer described the advance publicity engineered for the *Waverleys*. He owns to a slight sensation of sickness at hearing the "old-womanish maundering and drivelling" with which each "*Waverley*" was spoken of before publication. Quite obscure people managed to get what

they called a "peep behind the curtain and a read, forty-eight hours ahead of publication." How they would boast of the new heroes and heroines, the new catastrophes, more tragic than any that had preceded them, the new old hags who would ban or bless or prophesy to the pity and terror of all readers! These "blue-stockings," "these long-waisted, starched, breastless spinsters, these fat-faced boys with unmeaning eyes and coifs of hair twisted over their low foreheads," how they revelled in the mystery! It is to be noted that after a while the spate of novels exhausted the reviewers. Journals could not cope with the books individually and bunched several into an article.

Scott, of course, read all his reviews, and in order to conceal the unnatural over-productivity which had its origin in the fact that he had been composing romances for very much longer than he cared to admit, he devised and resorted to a deliberate system of mystification about the authorship of some of his work. Besides putting out the "Author of Waverley's Novels," he issued certain stories accounted for in what now seems a very cumbrous and humourless way. *Tales of my Landlord*, *Tales Derived from Benedictine Sources*, *Tales of the Crusaders* and *Chronicles of the Canongate*. *Tales of my Landlord* were announced as sold by Jedediah Cleishbotham, schoolmaster and parish clerk of Gandercleugh, and Jedediah Cleishbotham said they had been composed by his assistant schoolmaster, Peter Patterson, from stories told by the landlord of the Wallace Inn at Gandercleugh. There were six of these landlord tales. The *Tales derived from Benedictine Sources* were two in number, *The Monastery* and *The Abbot*. The *Tales of the Crusaders* were also two in number, *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman*. The *Chronicles of the*

Canongate comprised *The Highland Widow*, *The Two Drovers* and *The Fair Maid of Perth*.

That Scott's style was easily recognisable does not seem to have worried the author at all. It was not for the public to cavil at the way he chose to present his gifts to them, and surely he was free to do what he liked with his own. As a matter of fact he really loved concealed action and nothing pleased him more than that he should be described as "the great Magician who dwelleth in the old fortress by the river Jordan," words first applied to him by James Hogg in the *Chaldee MS.* in 1817. David Wilkie, who was in the library with him at Abbotsford when he first read the sentence, thought he would choke, so delightedly did he laugh. From Scott's point of view, it was a better jest than either Hogg or Wilkie could really grasp. Here was he, a man with duties at the Court of Session, working as a county Judge and landed proprietor, as a chronicler of Border antiquities, as a diligent versifier, secretly publishing seven successful novels in four years, none of them under his own name ! Why, the mere mechanical feat of copying the number of pages involved would be a full-time job for a spry attorney's apprentice. It was enchanting to reflect that a busy man at the age of forty-three should, with no apparent experience or practice, be turning out at short intervals mature, money-making romances. What fun life could be if you knew how to make use of it !

In his resolution to carry out the role for which he had cast himself, Sir Walter was constantly obliged to deny that he was the author of *Waverley*. We have the personal testimony of Lady Abercorn, Samuel Warren, Mrs. Slade and many other personal friends to this effect. When it leaked out, as it was inevitable that it should, that he was

really a novelist as well as an archaeologist, poet and man of affairs, he arranged for rumours to be put about that the novels everyone was clamouring to read were rapidly written, tossed off, so to speak, in the odd moments of a busy legal life. Legends giving substance to this belief grew like mushrooms in a night. It suited Scott's humour to pretend, if he had to submit to be taxed with the authorship of novels, that he was that rarest of rare creatures, an untutored, blithe being, who romanced by the gift of God. His pose was almost that of a legerdemain artist who can produce bouquets, eggs, goldfish, rabbits, from his head or his hat at will. The rapid succession of tales which followed the original seven on to library tables seemed to give body to the notion that, unlike every author since the world began, he had nothing to learn about composition, construction or the choice of words.

The true account of the way Sir Walter wrote his books has yet to be revealed, for the order in which the poems and novels were printed cannot, as we may from internal evidence deduce, have been the order in which they were written, and everyone must admit that to know the chronology of an author's work is essential to the understanding of him and his works. In point of fact we shall find Sir Walter tucking away early manuscripts and using them at a later stage in his career. Novels published in 1823, 1824, 1828, were some of them composed many years earlier. The flaws in the Waverley legend become evident when the poems and tales are examined in a frankly unprejudiced and impartial spirit. Both poems and novels gain immensely in interest if we scrutinise them in this way, for we find ourselves getting on to more intimate and affectionate terms with their author than ever before, and, if we happen to

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be writers, draw great encouragement from learning how slowly Scott learned his craft and with what difficulties he had to contend in expressing himself and in achieving his own peculiar idiom.

III

In order to assess at all accurately the scope of Scott's literary activities we must cursorily survey the skeleton framework on which he constructed his career. Sir Walter's life was spent almost entirely in Scotland and much of his youthful energy was devoted to presenting his country, its people and its history to the outside world, and he did this in such a triumphant way as to oblige those who had no interest in Scotland or things Scottish to read books like *The Antiquary*, *Old Mortality* and *Rob Roy*. Born seventeen years before the French Revolution, he died in the second year of the reign of William IV. His father was an Edinburgh attorney and Writer to the Signet, who sent him, as a baby suffering from infantile paralysis, to the farm at Sandyknowe in which he had himself been reared. Living for several years with grandparents involuntarily caused him to absorb their outlook on time, an invaluable asset as it was to turn out, for it brought events that to his parents' generation had already assumed the drab guise of past history into his orbit as life itself. The Rising of 1745 was to his grandparents something that had happened to them, and formed part of the living texture of their experience. From their lips he learnt to lisp ballads as he played in the garden or wandered off to romantic Smailholm Keep.

When Wattie Scott, still a child, returned to his home in Edinburgh, he was already marked out and set aside for

his idiosyncratic life, a life which to a great extent isolated him in spirit from the brothers and sisters living under the same roof. After some six years of school attendance in the city came an illness so serious as to keep him in bed for six months. At fifteen he was indentured as apprentice attorney to his father, and learnt to cover foolscap with legible script at almost incredible speed. As became his habit in later life, he now divided his existence into two compartments : one an office in which business was transacted and the other a playroom to which he retired to be alone with his thoughts. Every moment of free daylight was devoted to studying the antiquities within his reach, and during vacations he frequented the Border.

On the eve of the summer recess of 1792 Wattie Scott became a fully-fledged advocate and in his new bombasine robe swept proudly through Parliament House. From henceforth he was to spend much of his time within these walls, and in winter the briefless barrister became known to other briefless young men as "Duns Scotus," narrator of stories that made their waiting hours less tedious. Walter Scott never became a very successful advocate, his heart was not in it, and in his fifth year at the Bar we find him earning but £144, £50 of which was paid by his father for hack work done in his office. As he never wasted either time or opportunity and had need of books, he offered his services free as curator of the Advocates' Library, which gave him access at all times to treasures he could not have obtained elsewhere. When the call for volunteers to defend the coasts against the French was sounded, he joined the Midlothian Yeomanry which, like most yeomanry, had a smart, becoming tunic which it was a delight to him to wear.

On a riding excursion through Cumberland during the summer of 1797 he chanced, in a hotel at Gilsland, to make acquaintance with a French girl. Falling precipitately in love, he offered to return to Carlisle at Christmas to marry her. Though he was but a plain-headed Scottish advocate, dainty Charlotte Charpentier accepted his offer with alacrity. After marriage they made their home in South Castle Street, Edinburgh, and for the summer moved out to Lasswade, six miles from the city. The cottage they lived in there nestled under a thick beehive-shaped thatch and was what was known in those days as a *cottage orné*. It was humble of aspect, but contained comfortable rooms, a spacious stairway and a secret passage. The house was rather bare when they arrived, but was soon converted into a lovers' bower of honeysuckle and roses. The wooden stem of an old jasmine tree planted by Charlotte still entwines the door. By day they linked crooked trees together to form an archway and laughed at the romantic turn they could give to things. By night they linked arms and sauntered through the moonlit garden out to the hawthorn-hedged track that led to Hawthornden. If ever Wattie knew the sweet folly of love he knew it at Lasswade.

When, early one September morning in 1802, William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy walked between the red-berried hawthorns to the cottage, they were made welcome by having the first four cantos of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* recited to them, for Scott happened to be working on the poem at the moment. He wanted reassuring as to the metre, which seemed too monotonous. Willie Erskine, a great friend, had been cold about the merits of *The Lay*, and so had other auditors. Wordsworth cannot have given the versifier much encouragement for

we find him putting the manuscript on one side for some months, and taking it out the following year to try and introduce more variety of metre. He continued working on the poem in a desultory way for another year and only brought it out in January 1805. The public rushed to buy it and the author netted over a thousand pounds. As *The Lay* is made up of a series of episodes strung together by a minstrel voice, many of its stanzas, such as "Breathes there a man," "Oh Caledonia stern and wild" and the lines on Melrose Abbey, were soon being recited everywhere. Scott had at one bound made his mark among his contemporaries.

IV

For several years his lack of success in brief-hunting had made Scott long for an administrative or official post with a fixed stipend such as that of a Sheriff or a Clerk of Session, but it was an age of patronage and in order to catch the favourable notice of patrons it was obligatory to have attained success in one line or another. Scott was nothing if not ingenious in his method of attaining his ambition of being recommended as prospective Sheriff-depute of Selkirkshire. The holder of the office was old and sick, but he was a scholar and an antiquary who, when tapped by a young advocate for information about ballads, was pleased to furnish contributions to *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. With this man lay the power of indicating his successor.

More than ever as a married man did Scott long for a fixed income, but it was eighteen months after his wedding before he managed to get himself nominated for the Shrievalty. Advised that he should approach his neighbour,

the Duke of Buccleuch for help, he was reminded by him that all Crown patronage in Scotland was best come by through Henry Dundas of Melville Castle, at the moment Secretary at War in London. Armed with a letter of recommendation from the Duke, Scott went to London. The Secretary at War proved easy to deal with ; he had of course heard of Scott from his sons in the Yeomanry, and was prepared to nominate him without delay as old Mr. Plummer's successor.

Seven months later Walter Scott secured the post. It was worth £300 a year for life, and he was to hold it for thirty-two years. His next move to extricate himself for good from the toils of advocacy was to try and get his name on to a list to be considered when new Clerks of Session had to be appointed. Selecting one of the feeblest of the holders of the office he, having made up his mind to succeed him, offered to do his work for him without remuneration. This for Scott had two advantages, it familiarised him with the duties of the office and ingratiated him with Mr. George Home, who was persuaded to cede his patent for the full salary of £800 a year. The new patent was to be drawn up in Scott's name and, to make sure of the validity of the document, he again went to London. Lord Melville having been impeached, it was to Lord Spencer at the Home Office that he had to make application. Lord Spencer made no trouble about granting his request and a very well-satisfied suppliant returned to Scotland.

It was at this time that Scott turned his mind to the business of publishing. In 1805 he inherited property in Kelso, which he sold for £5000. In considering the uses to which the money might be put, he reflected that he had three years earlier lent James Ballantyne £500 to move his

presses from Kelso to Edinburgh, and that he had received good interest on his loan. The new money might well be invested in the Ballantyne business, which was kept in full work by Archibald Constable. James Ballantyne welcomed the proposal and it was at once implemented. The arrangement proved so profitable that in 1809 Scott ventured to set up James's brother, John, as book distributor or publisher. He thus brought about what seemed to him the satisfactory scheme of financing a printing firm under one friend and a publishing firm under another, both of which he could arrange should remain, in practice, under his effective control. James Ballantyne from now on had to watch Scott's exasperating experiments with finance and see the profits of the printing firm go to the bolstering up of the publishing firm or the paying out of the huge sums demanded by his popular and sanguine patron for the poems issued between 1808 and 1813. In neither firm would Scott allow any profits to be paid into capital account.

v

By this time the Sheriff-depute had managed to acquire great facility in writing, mainly through working for *The Edinburgh Review*, for which periodical he, between the years 1802 and 1806, contributed fifteen articles of considerable length on subjects varying from Amadis of Gaul to Cookery. When Scott succeeded Mr. Home as Clerk of Session he felt he could well afford to give up advocacy. The clerkship was a sedentary job and would ensure him ample time and opportunity for reading and writing. From henceforward there must be no looking back ; he saw his way clear to fortune and gaily undertook the editing of Dryden's *Works*

in eighteen volumes at forty guineas apiece, to include the provision of a critical biography. He also agreed to prepare for the Ballantyne press a new edition of *Queenhoo Hall*, Ralph Sadler's *State Papers*, Carleton's *Memoirs of the War of the Spanish Succession* and the *Memoirs of Robert Carey, Earl of Monmouth*. No one could say he was afraid of work !

In 1808 he allowed the principal publisher in Edinburgh, Archibald Constable, to publish a new poem, *Marmion*, for a lump sum down of £1000, but soon afterwards it occurred to him that he might have netted a good deal more money if he had made the Ballantyne firm the publisher. His next poem, *The Lady of the Lake*, was therefore given to John Ballantyne, who, though he had to pay the author two thousand guineas, made a considerable profit for the firm on the transaction. Scott's idea of his own value rose steeply, and for *Rokeby* he demanded three thousand pounds. *Rokeby* was not the success its predecessors had been : the sudden slump in sales was very alarming to both Ballantynes. How would such an unexpected result affect the Canongate Press ? Was the public tiring of poetical narrative or was Scott right in recognising in the Byron boom a menace to his own type of work ?

The failure of *Rokeby* could not have been altogether a surprise to its author, for he had read the venomous attack made on him before the poem was published. Impertinent Leigh Hunt had seen fit to adjure him in a rather mortifying way :

“ Be original, man ; study more, scribble less ;
Nor mistake present favours for lasting success ;
And remember if laurels are what you would find
The crown of all triumph is freedom of mind.”

Almost as soon as *Rokeby* was out, Tom Moore, too, had a fling at its author :

“ Mr. Sc’tt you must know
Having quitted the Border to seek new renown
Is coming, by long Quarto stages to town
And beginning with *Rokeby* (the job’s sure to pay)
Means to *do* all the gentlemen’s seats on the way.
Now the scheme is (though none of our hackneys can beat him)
To start a fresh poet through Highgate to meet him ;
Who by means of quick profit—no revises—long coaches
May do a few villas before Scott approaches.
Indeed if our Pegasus be not curst shabby
He’ll reach without foundering, at least Woburn Abbey.”

Even Wordsworth could not resist slinging a stone at Scott :

“ He writes his verses with huge speed,
Faster than printer boy can set them,
Faster far than we can read,
And only not so fast as we forget them.”

Stimulated, as always, by a set-back, Scott, full of vitality and resource, decided to meet the situation created by the devaluation of his verse by delving among his prose manuscripts and extracting therefrom a half-finished story, *'Tis Sixty Years Since*, with a hero of the name of Waverley. It seemed to him to read well and he entered it on the publishing list of John Ballantyne, but John did not like it at all and refused to publish it. This was annoying to his patron, who had special uses for lump sums of money at the moment as he had bought Cartley Farm on the Tweed and proposed moving into the house as soon as he could. *'Tis Sixty Years Since* was returned to its drawer, and two years later emerged again rather coyly in printed sheets which were handed round privately to friends in

Edinburgh. It was not till July 1814 that Constable was persuaded to publish the tale under the title of *Waverley*: he had so poor an opinion of its merits as a story that he only ventured to have one thousand copies printed.

Before knowing what a huge success the book was going to be, its author was invited by the Lighthouse Commissioners to accompany them on their yacht to the Hebrides. He took with him on this voyage a long poem, *The Lord of the Isles*, written before he had thought of *Rokeby*. It was designed to commemorate Robert Bruce and the Battle of Bannockburn, and merely needed "scenic accessories" to be complete. Scott's companions on the yacht noticed that he was scribbling hard at what they thought must be a novel. They were right in their conjecture; it was the draft of a story that appeared many years later as *The Pirate*.

VI

On his return to Edinburgh, Scott worked away on another manuscript, *Guy Mannering*, part of which must have been lying by for some time. The Ballantyne press was told to set up an edition in type and then let publishers have what he called "a scent of roast meat." Constable liked the savour, bought the printed sheets and set up an edition of his own. The anonymous author then started in good fettle for London, to enjoy the fame and publicity that had accrued to him as a popular poet. The Regent, who "preferred Scott's verse to that of every bard past or present," had offered him the Laureateship which he had declined in favour of his friend Robert Southey. This was considered a charming gesture by his would-be patron, who

invited him to dinner and greeted him as "Wattie." They spent an altogether delightful evening devoid of stiffness or awkward etiquette, with His Royal Highness graciously and hilariously singing songs over the port. This dip into court circles fascinated Scott, who went away with a snuff-box set in diamonds in his pocket.

Lord Byron was not quite so easy to understand as the jovial Regent. It puzzled Scott that the author of *The Giaour* should have sent him a copy of the poem with the dedication "To the Monarch of Parnassus from one of his subjects." Was he poking fun at him by chance? Such suspicions were allayed by a happy meeting with its author in John Murray's house in Albemarle Street. After it, the two poets stumped downstairs and hobbled away together—Byron in his black coat and white trousers and Scott in his "London blacks—looking just like any other ill-fitted gentleman."

Scott carried away the impression that he had the advantage over Byron in the extent of his reading, and was surprised to gather that the rhymers who had superseded him in public favour knew nothing of Scottish literature, in spite of his pleasant Scottish accent, and had no fixed opinions in religion or politics.

Not long after his return to work in the Court of Session the exciting news of the victory of Waterloo was announced and the Continent thrown open once again to peaceful travellers. The Sheriff determined to make tracks for the battlefield as soon as the law term ended. He longed to see the ground where Scots had died that he might immortalise their valour, for his mind always dwelt by preference on the men of his own country. After making a conscientious survey on horseback of the partly ploughed

battlefield, he, who had no nose where high grouse or ripe Gorgonzola was concerned, was acutely conscious of the pestilential fumes rising from trench and mound. The sense of the glory of victory gave place to the realisation of the tragedy of sacrifice. From the purveyors of relics he sadly acquired buttons, eagles, a sword, a carbine for his "museum," and then set about writing the stanza entitled *Waterloo*. It is not a very good poem as even the better verses reveal :

"Thou saw'st in seas of gore expire
Redoubted Picton's soul of fire,
Saw'st in the mingled carnage lie
All that of Ponsonby could die.

.
Saw'st gallant Miller's failing eye
Still bent where Albion's banners fly,
And Cameron in the shock of steel
Die like the offspring of Lochiel ;
And generous Gordon 'mid the strife
Fall while he watch'd his leader's life."

Scott admirers would have praised the poem if they could, but fell to laughing instead at a quatrain circulated by a scoffer.

"Full many a gallant man lies slain
On Waterloo's ensanguined plain
But none by bullet or by shot
Fell half so flat as Walter Scott."

Though forty-four years old at this time Scott had never before been abroad, and a visit to Paris proved an extremely stimulating experience. What gave him the most immediate delight was to watch brawny Highlanders broiling their

ration meat in the cuirasses of the French Imperial Guard, and how he loved to hear the bagpipes skirling through the Tuileries gardens !

In his Deputy-Lieutenant's uniform, he was presented to the Czar and shown much civility by the Duke of Wellington and Lord Cathcart. His company at a picnic at Ermenonville was commanded by Lady Castlereagh, but this literary attention was almost wasted on him as he had never read Rousseau's works and was therefore indifferent to the associations connected with his grave.

On his way home he stopped for a day or two in London and invited Byron to dine with him at Long's Hotel so that they might compare notes over their impressions of Waterloo, but Byron showed himself so unmistakably bored by what his host had to say about the battlefield that the evening was spent in talking of quite other matters. Scott's forte was narration : he could make statements and he could make jokes, but he was weak in discussion as Byron soon discovered.

Back in Scotland, the traveller hastily revised *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, written journalistically during his foreign tour. In them he tried to instruct opinion on the situation produced by the Restoration of the Monarchy in France and drew comparisons between Charles II in England and Louis XVIII. The latter he alluded to as "the good old Bourbon called to wear his crown of thorns" and regretted that infirmity should preclude him from showing himself off on horseback to his subjects. The revision bored him terribly. He knew the *Letters* were poor stuff, mere pot-boilers, and he was longing to get going on *The Antiquary*. When he had corrected his last proofs he sent them off to James Ballantyne with the message :

“I’ve done, thank God, with all the yarns
Of the most prosy of apostles—Paul
And now advance, sweet heathen of Monkbarns,
Step out, old quiz, as fast as I can scrawl.”

Writing *The Antiquary* proved a most delightful occupation. The author was really very pleased with it as a novel, and when asked in later years which of the “Waverleys” he preferred would always say, “Well I, for my part, enjoyed *The Antiquary* more than any other. There are touches of pathos in it which much affected me; and I had many a hearty laugh at the expense of the Antiquary himself.” Six thousand copies of the novel were sold in three days.

VII

It was after publishing *The Antiquary* as by the author of *Waverley* that Scott began his new series, *Tales of my Landlord*, with *Old Mortality*, a book that was a good deal of trouble to write as it involved poring over tracts, sermons and the history of the Covenanters.) Lockhart tells us that it was the first time he had worked up the material for a novel from books. In sending an advance copy to his dear Lady Abercorn he suggested to her that it might prove to be “the production of the unknown author of *Guy Mannering*.”

Payment for these books enabled him to add the Rhymer’s Glen to his holding by the Tweed. Life was magically rich at this time to Scott, and his efflorescence satisfying even to himself. How cleverly he had organised his existence, and what fun it was to have the Canongate Press making all the money he wanted, and how amusing to be able to

palm his books off as the work of several authors ! The passion for concealment obliged anyone in Scott's confidence to almost unlimited prevarication, and what had originated in self-protection from criticism was continued out of sheer enjoyment and love of mystification.

Within this gorgeous bloom of self-realisation, however, there began in 1817 to manifest itself a canker in the shape of acute suffering from stone. The sufferer called it cramp and worked on in all except the worst bouts. By May 1817 he appeared to have thrown the illness off and to be as well as ever. He was busy at the time over *Rob Roy* and the Jacobite rising of 1715. Archibald Constable, hearing that the book was nearing completion, came to Abbotsford to secure it. Scott told him he had not found a name for the new work. "Why not call it after the hero?" asked his visitor. "Never let me have to write up to a name," said the author, "you well know I have generally adopted a title that told nothing." All the same he took Constable's advice.

While the first edition of ten thousand *Rob Roys* was being turned out at the Canongate Press, Ballantyne received an order from his master to dangle a new Cleishbotham story in front of Mr. Constable's nose. Aggravated as the publisher was by Scott's tiresome pseudonymous humour, he thought it well to snap at the offer and print the book at once. The book was the *Heart of Midlothian*, which turned out to be a stupendous success.

In 1819 health seemed to desert Scott altogether. The cramp came back and he was sometimes in pain for eight hours at a time. He took up a fine and humble attitude over his sufferings, saying "I should be a great fool and a most ungrateful wretch to complain. My life has been as

fortunate as was ever lived." Both *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *The Legend of Montrose* were written in illness. In June he felt he must die and bade farewell to relations and friends, but somehow he recovered and by July was out of doors ambling about on a white pony and composing a new book. One of the signs of returning health was the invention of yet another editor of his next novel, Mr. Lawrence Templeton. Mr. Templeton's book was complete at Christmas 1819, and Constable liked it so much that he made an offer for the two next books whoever they were ascribed to. Mr. Templeton's book was *Ivanhoe*, the first of the pageant novels, and it was destined to widen Scott's circle of readers by half the continent. The narrative was a revelation to Dumas of the way history might be presented. In reading its amazing scenes, he began to perceive new possibilities for himself and in a month he was trying to imitate "ce merveilleux Scott."

VIII

In March 1820 Scott went to London to receive the Baronetcy conferred on him some eighteen months earlier by the Regent. Among the callers who visited him was Sir Thomas Lawrence, commissioned by the King to paint his portrait for the gallery at Windsor. This flattered him as did Chantrey's request that he should sit to him for his bust. All who met Sir Walter for the first time were charmed by his simplicity. No lion ever showed less conceit or appeared less self-conscious. Hayden, who was exhibiting a large picture at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, arrived there one morning to find the "mysterious author of *Waverley*" sitting on the stairs looking as contented as if he were resting

on a bank in the country. He certainly was made very happy at this time by the appreciation lavished on him and regretted having to return to Edinburgh to attend the wedding of his daughter Sophia with John Gibson Lockhart ; but a year later he was able to escape again to London to be present at the Coronation, staying with his old friend, Stewart Rose, who lived in Old Palace Yard, Westminster. It excited him greatly to see the effort made by the Queen to get into the Abbey. Writing of his former patroness to Ballantyne, he said, " The Bedlam Bitch of a Queen, you can't imagine the contempt she is held in. . . . She retired amid groans and cries of Shame ! Shame ! Home ! Home ! and the still more disgraceful acclamations of her own blackguards who exclaimed, ' That's it Caroline ! Go it my girl ! ' " Sir Walter thought the Queen must be mad to make such an attempt to attend the Coronation, " but mad or not mad, the common people of England were certainly on her side."

Once within the Abbey, Scott was caught up by the pomp and feudalism of the ceremony. To see the King and the Duke of York embrace, " pressed to each other's bosoms," was something he was glad not to have missed, and the effect produced by the action of the peers in placing their coronets on their own heads struck him as really august. It is a gesture that has delighted generations of spectators at every English coronation.

When George IV decided to visit Edinburgh at short notice in July 1822, the Lord Provost at once took counsel with that friend of Royalty, Sir Walter Scott. Between them they agreed to form a small committee to meet in Castle Street to organise the reception. For the time being the author of *Waverley* laid aside his literary work and set

himself to devise a real live pageant. The King was a difficult figure to romanticise, it was not at all like staging a welcome for Prince Charlie ; but he tried to stimulate popular enthusiasm with a ballad which was distributed as a broadsheet. In it he made it appear that the King's "sonsie" countenance was a sight all Scotland longed to see.

"Auld England held him lang and fast.
And Ireland had a joyfu' cast ;
But Scotland's turn is come at last—
Carle, now the King's come !

Auld Reekie, in her rokelay grey,
Thought never to have seen the day ;
He's been a weary time away—
But, Carle, now the King's come !"

A Court to be held at Holyrood, processions and banquets to be organised, a cathedral service to be planned, the foundation of a war memorial to be laid on Calton Hill—all these projects were discussed and arranged for. Scott's heart, however, was not in things like this, he was set on gathering within the precincts of the city as many Highland chiefs and clansmen as could be induced to play their part in a loyal welcome. Some three hundred haughty and kilted gentlemen turned up, all sensitive about precedence. Fortunately for Sir Walter they took their stand on their relative positions at Bannockburn, about which battle he knew as much, if not more, than they did. None of them could take orders from the other, but all took them from Scott.

When the *Royal George* anchored in Leith Roads in sheets of rain it fell to Sir Walter to go aboard and humbly request His Majesty to defer landing till the next day. "Impatient,

Sire, as your loyal subjects are to see you plant your foot upon their soil, they hope you will consent to postpone your public entry until to-morrow," and then after narrating a humorous anecdote, he added a few homely words, "I canna think how it should rain this way, just as Your Majesty, of all men in the world, should have condescended to come and see us. I can only say, in the name of my countrymen, I'm just ashamed of the weather." The King laughed heartily and called for cherry brandy in which to drink the ambassador's health. Begging that the glass touched by royal lips might be given to him as a souvenir of the occasion, Scott wrapped it in a kerchief and pushed it into his tail pocket. In Castle Street he found guests assembled and, after greeting them, sat down heavily on a chair. He started up again with a scream, and Lady Scott wondered whether she could have left a pair of scissors on the seat.

Next day the sun shone hotly upon the plumed Highlanders in their parti-coloured plaids, the Archers in Lincoln green, and the women in gay summer finery. The people were in carnival mood, but arranged themselves in dense walls to greet the King as he passed along the road. He was seen to blanch perceptibly as he looked down Princes Street and saw the warm, welcoming crowds. In response he rose to standing posture in his carriage, but the cheers were emotionally too much for him and he sank down again and burst into tears.

The levee at Holyrood rejoiced Scott's heart for it brought back to that forsaken shell, broadswords, shields and banners hidden since '45, and officers of state in rich antique costumes, and courtiers and subjects doing homage. Southey, the Poet Laureate, did his best to give point to the occasion.

“ At length hath Scotland seen
The presence long desired
The pomp of royalty,
Hath gladdened once again
Her ancient palace, desolate how long ! ”

But it was his patron, Sir Walter, who really carried off the honours of production.

IX

Abbotsford, the repository of all dreams, was at this time on the verge of consummation. For years past its possession had been a focal point of delight, and in its construction life-long aspirations had been enshrined. There it stood with its museum, its armour, its Gothic carvings, its abbatial associations, its glorious gilt-caged library complete with red-leathered volumes of Montfauçon, Variorum classics and Byron urn. Through the scutcheoned windows the green and golden sunlight fell upon the stone floor of a baronial hall ; shields of heraldic devices told their story from the cornice, nuns' heads peeked from the angles ; it was a boy's fancy come true, for the sick boy who had lain in bed all those years ago in Edinburgh reading of feats of arms and learning the language of heraldry had managed to transmute his visions into solid shape and was master in this wonderland.

When Washington Irving went to Abbotsford he found a very happy host in an old green jacket and canvas pantaloons messing about with trowel and mortar. Many people observed how Scott came to life in the country. Edward Everett noticed it when he was welcomed with the unflagging cordiality that was the distinction of the laird of

Abbotsford. It surprised Everett somewhat to find that the Scott family had no copy of the newly published *Heart of Midlothian* and had to borrow his copy to read aloud after dinner. Scott, taking his turn with the rest, commented on the pages which struck him.

It was his passion for Abbotsford that proved Scott's undoing, for he spent money wildly on improvements. It is said that in one way and another it cost him more than £70,000. His method of raising the money he spent so freely frightened the Ballantynes terribly, and when John died in 1821 James was left to cope with Sir Walter alone. Nothing seemed to allay his mad craving for land. In the very year of his crash he "was meditating a new purchase" for £40,000. Though borrowing money against the credit of the Canongate firm, he in the end found himself faced with a huge deficit and with the obligation to mortgage Abbotsford to save the interlocking firm of Constable. This was not enough to stave off catastrophe. Scott had to insure his life and spend what remained of it in slavery to creditors. His moral grandeur manifested itself in his refusal to admit defeat or despair and in his indefatigable application to the task of paying his debts. By Christmas 1827, rather less than two years after the crash, he had earned £40,000. *Woodstock*, *The Fair Maid of Perth*, *Anne of Geierstein*, *Chronicles of the Canongate*, *Tales of a Grandfather*, the fourth series of *Tales of my Landlord*, all appeared after the bankruptcy, and so did the *Life of Napoleon*. For this biography he had to go and collect material in Paris where he had a glowing sunset-like success with "coveys" of Russian ladies gathering round him in tartan dresses, a "Waverley" costume ball given in his honour, and *Ivanhoe* playing to packed houses. On his return he attended a Theatrical

Dinner. The chairman, Lord Meadowbank, proposed the health of the man "who has conferred a new reputation on our national character and bestowed on Scotland an imperishable name." Another speaker alluded to the presence of the "Great Unknown," and Scott slyly intervened with "The Small Known now, Mr. Baillie!" In replying, he for the first time admitted himself to be the author of *Waverley* and said caprice had had much to do with his prolonged unwillingness to disclose the fact.

The Journal, written during Sir Walter's last years, is, as everyone knows, a record of gradual decline. Some of us may regret that it did not occur to Scott to keep it in the heyday of his strength and success, and yet this narrative of illness, sleeplessness, financial difficulties, death of friends, funerals, has been of inestimable help to people going through like experiences. Many people would have found the afflictions unendurable, but he endured them cheerfully, smiled in the face of fate and gave thanks that he had drunk of the cup of life so deeply. Exposed to misfortune Sir Walter retained his good humour, good temper and dignity. He was indeed a man.

THE WORK

I

IT has been generally assumed by lecturers and writers on Sir Walter Scott that in his literary career an orderly course of development may be discerned. He has been described as first a collector of ballads then an imitator of ballads, progressing from ballads to narrative poems and from narrative poems by the paths of criticism and reviewing to the production of masterly romances in prose. By common consent a neat and comprehensible pattern has been imposed on a life that was neither neat nor easily to be comprehended, although as a matter of fact such a summing up of his unfolding leaves his essential nature out of account.

Attentive re-reading of the Waverley Novels combined with knowledge of their author's way of life has obliged me to divide the novels roughly into two main groups—romances that show signs of being patched work and romances which appear to be woven all of a piece. It is from studying the former group that we are enabled to discover how gradually Scott found his proper idiom and achieved his remarkable fluency in writing.

Before, however, examining any of the novels in detail we should acquaint ourselves with the proclivities of Walter as a boy, for they constitute the spring-board of his future bound into fame. Only in recent years has it come to be known that Scott owed to having been an inveterate scribbler his whole life long. In a letter written in 1789 to

a girl called "Jessie who lived in Kelso" which was not published till 1932, he says :

"For a long time past I have been spoiling a vast quantity of good paper. . . . I have dared attempt an epic poem of hundreds and hundreds of lines—a chronicle in verse of the wondrous doings of some famous knights. . . . Indeed the extent of my industry is in this way something marvellous."

At the date this was written Wattie was seventeen, and the assiduous writing he describes is just what one would expect from a future author whose daimon drove him furiously to composition. To his contemporaries James Ballantyne and John Irving, he was the best story-teller they knew and his repertory seemed inexhaustible. Every Saturday morning, recounts John Irving, he and the two other boys used to make their way to Salisbury Crag with books tucked under their arms ; volumes of Spenser, Ariosto and Boiardo. Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* was a favourite of theirs with all its "gothick" mystery and its colossal ghost. The boys would read aloud to each other, and John Irving noticed that weeks and even months afterwards Wattie could remember and repeat the passages or pages that had particularly impressed him.

Three years before writing his letter to Jessie, Walter Scott had been struck off the active list by an internal haemorrhage and had had to spend several months in bed. As for the time being he could not attend school, he occupied himself copying out old ballads and reading all the chronicles and historical books Sibbald's circulating library could produce. In this way he acquired vast archaeological lore, stored his capacious and retentive memory, and laid the foundation of his many-faceted interests. The devotion to "useless" books was a taste his father could not stomach.

Why did not the boy read law or some subject that would enable him to earn a decent living ? Nothing the Writer to the Signet could say or do changed Wattie's bent, but when the boy's health had re-established itself, he showed himself quite docile about drudging away his appointed hours as a clerk, but all spare time, whatever, had to be devoted, not to getting to know more about his father's profession, but to his own palpitating interests. Wattie would button-hold and question all the old people with whom he came in contact about their recollections as if his life depended on it, as in a very real way it did ; he also would snatch at every opportunity of tramping off to investigate castles and remains of every kind. What was most exasperating of all to his father was that the vagrant never came back empty-handed. As often as not relics of stone and wood and iron would be brought home and arranged in the semi-basement allotted to his use in the family house in George Square. Mr. and Mrs. Scott alike deplored the fact that it was becoming more like a scrap-heap than the study it was intended to be.

From one of Wattie's letters to Jessie it would seem that the girl was not very happy in her family life and to comfort her he told her that he was not very happy either.

“ Your home,” he wrote, “ cannot be a very agreeable one, and I can more easily sympathise with you on this point than on any other, having no little experience of similar wretchedness.”

His “ wretchedness ” was to some degree worked-off by the writing of verse. In 1786 we find him showing a poem, *The Conquest of Granada*, to a friend. All we know about it is that it consisted of four books of about four hundred lines each and was burnt soon after completion. Yet another

poem emerges from the gloom of youth, *Guiscard and Matilda* ; it was inscribed to Miss Keith of Ravelston. The documentation of these early years is not nearly as detailed as it would have been had not Lockhart at one time had control of the family papers. Many letters dating from 1786 were destroyed ; letters written to an admiring friend who, even then, was prophesying that Wattie's pen would make him famous. Lockhart explains that it was owing "to the delicate nature of the transactions therein dwelt upon" that this decision was carried out, presumably by him. The disappearance of these early letters, deplorable though it seems, does not prevent us from taking up the thread of Scott's literary life again in 1791 when he was nineteen years old and for the summer vacation had snugly ensconced himself in a farmhouse adjacent to Flodden, with Otterburn, Ford and Chillingham "all within the compass of a forenoon's ride."

A little later on we find him staying at Hexham getting to know every furlong of the Roman Wall and exploring all the approaches to Scotland from the south. One of his amusements was to create for himself the instruments of a technical memory that would automatically call up visions of the scenes he had visited and the personages associated with them.

"Wherever I went I cut a piece of a branch from a tree—these constituted what I call my log-book ; and I intended to have a set of chess men made out of them, each having reference to the place where it was cut—as the kings from Falkland and Holyrood ; the queens from Queen Mary's yew tree at Crookston ; the bishops from abbeys or episcopal palaces ; the knights from baronial residences ; the rooks from royal fortresses ; and the pawns generally from places of historical note."

From localities bound up with passionate events, from ruined keeps that had once housed the heroic figures of history, and even from a sword or a thumbscrew, Scott derived emotions of a most pervading, overwhelming kind, for his perceptive impulses were unusually potent. Scenery, unglorified by tradition, never affected him as did battlefields and ruins. "Wandering over the field of Bannockburn was a source of more exquisite pleasure," he says, "than gazing on the celebrated landscape from the battlements of Stirling Castle, for the field of battle became at once filled with combatants in their proper costume." Not everyone, he was to learn, shared his enthusiasms; his hearers, indeed, often showed unmistakable signs of being bored or overwhelmed by his excitation and by his powers of description.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge once contrasted his own sentiment, or absence of sentiment, with that of the author of *Waverley*.

"Sir Walter Scott and myself were exact but harmonious opposites in this—that every old ruin, hill or river or tree called up in his mind a host of historical or biographical associations, just as a bright pan of brass when beaten is said to attract swarming bees: whereas for myself, notwithstanding Dr. Johnson, I believe I should walk over the plain of Marathon without taking more interest in it than in any other plain of similar features."

And not only did Scott perceive but he longed to convey the results of his perceptions to others, and therefore from the very first he was obliged, as he had confessed to Jessie, to write and write and write. All the orthodox theories of his having come suddenly to realise his peculiar aptitudes are so much word-spinning. The self-sharing impulses that seethed and bubbled up so turbulently within him obliged

him to make experiment after experiment in prose, drama, history, metre and romance, and never, once he had taken up his pen, did he lay it down or let it rust in his hand. What young man with the extraordinary faculty of being able to suffuse the objects of which he took cognisance with his own emotions could fail to pour out his experiences at the most impressionable moments of his life? If his mouth was sealed at home he could tell stories to his school-mates: if his pen copied nothing but legal documents in his father's office, it wrote rapidly enough of his own fancies in the semi-basement. Things came to life because he cared for them; that was his wonderful discovery, and Wattie was not one to hide his treasure in a napkin.

II

Before he was in any way known outside his immediate circle, Walter Scott, youthful and enthusiastic, had as we have seen become familiar with every ruin and battleground in the north of England. The glories of Northumbria in stone and story had buried themselves deeply in his receptive and capacious mind. He haunted and he loved that "matchless proof of high devotion now waxed cold"—the cathedral of Durham—as he loved no other place. His strong combative interests led him from Wooler to investigate the disposition of the armies that fought at Flodden. Along the coast road by Bamborough to Whitby he travelled, gazed on Lord Marmion's effigy at Tanfield, then made his way across country to Jervaulx, wandered up through the Lake country and the Cumberland Waste, gleaning Arthurian legends as he went. Most vigorously was he stimulated by

these solitary excursions about which he early developed the habit of secretiveness and mystification. Never did he give away the source of his fertilisation. Though obviously he must have been inspired by the sight of the Keep at Tanfield and the Marmion tombs of its church, he does not say so, but rather elaborately puts readers off the scent by assigning the hero of his poem to "Tamworth tower and town." Though he felt impelled on being shown the relic preserved at Scriven—the shirt in which Sir Henry Slingsby suffered on Tower Hill—anonymously to edit the *Slingsby Memoirs of the Civil War*, he never reveals what it was that obliged him to do so. Some of his early wanderings and reflections may be picked out in *Guy Mannering*, some in *Harold the Dauntless*, some in *The Bridal of Triermain* and many more in *Marmion* in which even the "snakes" or ammonites of Whitby find fame. Often as he walked the Roman Wall, the Romans never infused him with any wish to write about them. He was more interested in Danes than Romans as we may see in his 'prentice poem, *Harold the Dauntless*, polished, added to and published many years after it had been originally drafted. In reading it we note that the unpractised hand is betrayed in the crudity of much of the versification. Of the forays of a Danish chieftain he writes,

"Woe to the realms that he coasted ! for there
Was shedding of blood, and rending of hair,
Rape of maiden, and slaughter of priest,
Gathering of ravens and wolves to the feast
When he hoisted his standard black
Before him was battle, behind him was wrack
And he burned the churches, that heathen Dane
To light his band to their barks again."

During the conclave in Durham Cathedral and again when

Harold learns that his father's lands have been confiscated, we cannot fail to recognise the skill-less vigour of adolescence :

“ Loud laugh'd the stern Pagan—‘ They're free from the care
Of fief and of service, both Conyers and Vere ;
Six feet of your chancel is all they will need,
A buckler of stone and a corselet of lead.
Ho, Gunnar !—The tokens !’ and, sever'd anew,
A head and a hand on the altar he threw.
Then shudder'd with terror both Canon and Monk,
They knew the glazed eye and the countenance shrunk,
And of Anthony Conyers the half-grizzled hair,
And the scar on the hand of Sir Alberic Vere.
There was not a churchman or priest that was there
But grew pale at the sight, and betook him to prayer.”

These lines are in sharp contrast with the introductory stanzas to the third canto, which were evidently written much later, when he had perfected his craft, for in them the *Childe Harold* influence is plainly discernible.

“ Grey towers of Durham ! there was once a time
I view'd your battlements with such vague hope,
As brightens life in its first dawning prime ;
Not that e'en then came within fancy's scope
A vision vain of mitre, throne, or cope ;
Yet, gazing on the venerable hall,
Her flattering dreams would in perspective ope
Some reverend room, some prebendary's stall,—
And thus Hope me deceived as she deceiveth all.
Well yet I love thy mix'd and massive piles,
Half church of God, half castle 'gainst the Scot,
And long to roam these venerable aisles
With records stored of deeds long since forgot ;
There might I share my Surtees' happier lot,

Who leaves at will his patrimonial field
To ransack every crypt and hallowed spot,
And from oblivion rend the spoils they yield,
Restoring priestly chant and clang of knightly shield
Vain is the wish since other cares demand
Each vacant hour and in another clime ;
But still that northern harp invites my hand,
Which tells the wonder of thine earlier time."

From these stanzas it will be seen that Scott considered Robert Surtees of Mainsforth, whose life was cast in close proximity to Durham cathedral and other monuments of the past, the most enviable of human beings, a man with whom he would willingly have changed place, for young Scott found the English side of the Border a great deal more exciting and important than the northern side. Lowland Scotland had its Vallum Antonini, a poor substitute for the great Roman Wall : it could not pride itself on an Alnwick, a Lumley, a Middleham or even a Raby. As for the great twelfth-century Abbeys, they were alike on both sides of the Border and made less of an appeal to the youthful antiquarian than fortresses. After all, Churchmen recognised no frontier and, unlike their predecessors the Romans, were for including rather than excluding their war-like neighbours. Because the Abbeys formed part of the great Benedictine scheme for reclaiming from paganism the most northerly portions of Europe they could not be regarded as peculiarly English or peculiarly Scottish. The monastic establishments of Fountains, Rievaulx, Melrose, Dryburgh and Jedburgh constituted a group by themselves in his mind, and on account of their pacific international character did not inspire him in the same poignant way as did national buildings associated with bloody events.

Constituting himself a kind of warden of antiquities on

both sides of the Border, Scott took many notes that he made use of later in the large illustrated volumes in which he described castles, churches and other memorials of the past.¹ He became frantic if anyone tried to demolish ancient buildings and inveighed against Lord Darlington for converting the lower part of Balliol's Tower into a factory for small shot and "so making £30 a year by destroying one of the most curious vaulted roofs in England."

III

We have already alluded to the fact that traces of Scott's early walking tours are to be found embedded in several novels. In *Guy Mannering*, for example, part of the scenery depicted must have been recorded when, as a young barrister, he was preparing the McNaught defence (1793) and what is important as evidence of this is that some of the names in the novel correspond with those of witnesses in the trial. In any case *Guy Mannering* is a good specimen of a patchwork book and the author readily admits "the joins" when alluding to the *Astrologer's Tale*. Mr. Vanbeest Brown's reflections undoubtedly represent those of Scott himself as he tramped about the country and these reflections must have at one moment formed part of an epistolary narrative, for Julia's letters are written in imitation of the conventional romances of his boyhood. The real delight of *Guy Mannering* lies in these early revelations of the unspoiled spirit of Walter Scott, who scribbled away in wayside inns and in the open air because he could do no other. Our faculty for surprise

¹ *Border Antiquities of England and Scotland. Provincial Antiquities of Scotland.*

and reaction dwindles daily ; it is only youth that speaks like youth.

Let us accompany him on the last of his bachelor tours in the summer of 1797. He was at that time twenty-six years old and was riding in the company of his brother and a friend. After visiting Mayburgh and Brougham Castle the young men turned off the main road thinking it might be amusing to see life at the fashionable Spa of Gilsland. It was almost what a visit to Bath would have been to a Londoner in Brummell's day. As they walked their horses up the hill to the hotel a girl rode past them. (I take the story from R. K. Chambers and the scenery from my own observation.) Two of the trio did not notice her but to the third, Walter Scott, she appeared as a blinding vision of beauty. Dismounting, the newcomers engaged rooms at the Wardrew House close to the large new luxury hotel, The Shaws, where they were told the world of fashion stayed. The Shaws faced south and was surrounded by shaded policies in which the guests, who had no modern love of sunlight, dallied and gossiped when they were not dicing or dancing within doors or driving their four-in-hands and tandems out to picnics at Triermain Castle or the Roman Wall. On the very evening of his arrival Walter Scott, dressed in Yeomanry tunic of scarlet faced with blue, went over to a dance at The Shaws and managed to get introduced to the girl he had seen on horseback. She turned out to be a French orphan in the chaperonage of a Miss Nicolson from Carlisle. Scott there and then lost his heart to her irretrievably. At Gilsland one may still call up memories of the whirlwind courtship that ensued : one may wander up the deep ravine, to which the lovers repaired in the mornings, linger by the bubbling stream and the bridge,—no part of

the setting has changed since it was described by an eager suitor in *The Bridal of Triermain*. We may even perch on the traditional "Popping Stone" where he heard the "Yes," "the sound within three little letters bound" which "dizzied him with ecstasy." We may picnic at Birdoswald as the lovers in that day did, but we shall not, alas, recapture the lovers' mood, the pristine mood which enabled Scott to write eight lines to "a lady by the Roman Wall."

"Take these flowers which, purple waving,
On the ruin'd rampart grew,
Where, the sons of freedom braving,
Rome's imperial standards flew.

Warriors from the breach of danger
Pluck no longer laurels there;
They but yield the passing stranger
Wild-flower wreaths for Beauty's hair."

Owing to the impact of this revelation at Gilsland Scott's genius was released and he was at last to confirm himself both as a poet and a romance writer. In *The Bridal of Triermain*, which, like that other experimental poem, *Harold the Dauntless*, was completed, polished and published anonymously many years later (1814), we may read a lyrical rendering of his experience and see how he reconstructed Arthurian legends to beguile his lady love. Scott's courtship was for him an immensely significant affair, since it not only integrated his personality but released in him new and deeper powers, enabling him to suffuse even natural objects with his own emotion.

We will now examine *St. Ronan's Well* in the light of what we know about Walter Scott's courtship of Miss Charpentier. Clara Mowbray, its heroine, is dark, pale and

a skilled horsewoman. She rode "as never woman rode before" and "preferred a riding habit to all other clothes." In the story a Kashmir shawl is carefully described and a general concern with things Indian is displayed: palankeens, dooleys, sheroots, nabobs, all play a part in the conversation. Many French expressions, some of them unusual ones, occur in the course of the narrative—*encognure*, *diablerie*, *demi-jour*, *frappant*, *chiffonerie*, *fille de chambre*. The names in the book—Mowbrays, Shaws, Bonnyrigg, Clattering Ford and Brig—are to be met with in the neighbourhood of Gilsland. We must not lose sight of the fact that the girl to whom Walter Scott engaged himself at Gilsland was the daughter of a Frenchman who kept a school of equitation at Lyons. She rode and drove beautifully. She was small, dark and pretty, and she had received from her guardian, Lord Downshire, the present of a beautiful Kashmir shawl which she wore in the evenings. Her only brother was in the East India Company's service at Madras and he wrote to her frequently.

Finally, the descriptions of the rocky valley, the boulders, the stream, the scenery, fit in much better with Gilsland than with Innerleithen, the Scottish locality to which the story was later on transferred by admirers wishing to pen Scott up in Scotland and desirous of attracting tourists to his particular demesne.

In re-writing the story in 1822-3 Scott appears to have altered the chronology by inserting allusions to the Peninsular War. He also introduced into the book Scottish characters of, by this time, well-known type like Meg Dodds, McTurk and Meikleham, and, in deference to James Ballantyne, appears to have bowdlerised the plot.

Can anyone doubt that immediate and personal experiences

are described in the *tableaux vivants* at Shaws Castle? Do we not at once recognise the briefless barrister playing in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, "well qualified for the part of Wall since the composition of his skull might have rivalled in solidity the mortar and stone of the most approved builder"? The *bal paré* again reads like a personal experience. Finally, the secret marriage in Paris between the Earl of Etherington and the Comtesse de Martigny may well have been suggested to Scott's mind by the stories Charlotte told him of the adventures of her guardian, the Marquis of Downshire, in France.

Every critic who has written on the Scott Novels has commented on the strange fact that *St. Ronan's Well* stands apart from the rest. Distinguished writers like Francis Palgrave, W. P. Ker and John Buchan have been puzzled how to account for its singularity. Certain people have preferred the story to all the other romances. There is a well-known anecdote of Leslie Stephen asking a party of Alpinist companions each to write down his favourite Scott novel, with the result that all the papers handed in bore the name of *St. Ronan's Well*. John Buchan ingeniously proposed as a solution of the problem raised by the cropping up of a realistic novel in a series of romantic novels that Scott became a realist late in his career and in 1823 for a short time deliberately turned his back on romance. This explanation is scarcely embracing enough to account for the actual immaturity of the style and the construction, nor for the reflection of the influence of earlier novelists to be discerned in the book. Nor does the theory account for Scott's vivid description in it of the persons and places among which the most emotional period of his life was spent. The vigorous actuality displayed in these keen youthful observa-

tions preclude the notion that the shimmering texture of the narrative was disinterred from the caves of memory twenty-eight years later. By 1823 Scott's finer faculties had been dulled by illness and powerful drugs. He could not, even if he had wished, recapture the early fervour and flavour of youth. Balzac, when he read *St. Ronan's Well*, at once recognised it as, in the main, a cast from the life. He knew it must be fresh, early work since it made an appeal totally different in quality from that of the historical romances.

IV

In *Rob Roy* (1817), which John Buchan judged to be, as far as construction was concerned, one of Scott's worst novels, we may also find traces of Miss Charpentier. It is a good example of a patched work, and a wonderfully self-revealing book. For two hundred and eighteen pages we have studies of Mr. Scott, senior, and of Wattie in youth, and then begins the story known as *Rob Roy*. John Buchan always said that many people "got bogged in the earlier part of the book and never crossed the Border." In the preliminary part—obviously written while Scott was still seeking what literary path to follow—an old man tells the story of his youth, recounting his experience to a dear and intimate friend. He has studied Sully's *Memoirs* and owns that he himself is victim of a "seductive love of narrative." How best can good narration be achieved,—in Sully's way or in Julius Caesar's way? In another place and with reference to himself he confesses to having felt "as strongly as most folks that love of composition which is perhaps the strongest of all instincts driving the author

to the pen often without chance of fame or prospect of reward."

We may regard Frank Osbaldistone in *Rob Roy* as Walter Scott himself, re-named from a place that had taken his fancy in his pre-matrimonial wanderings in Northumberland—Biddlestone Hall. After explaining to his father in London that he has no wish to go into business and would as lief join the army as do anything else, Frank is given a month to consider his future and spends it studying *Orlando Furioso* and "the oft-recurring rhymes of the Spenserian stanza." When the month is up the practical, but keenly disappointed father arranges to exchange his only son against his brother's son, Rashleigh, of Osbaldistone Hall: Frank shall be given the chance of settling down as a country gentleman with his uncle. On his journey north, Frank meets a Mr. Campbell at the Black Bear in Darlington, and from this moment begins "the ravelling," as Scott called it, of Frank's story with that of *Rob Roy*.

Near Osbaldistone Frank runs into the hunt, the fox crosses the road, followed by hounds, the field and—Diana Vernon. Diana Vernon is the same dark-haired beauty we made acquaintance with in *St. Ronan's Well*. She has the same trick of tying her hair up under her hat and suddenly letting it fall loose; she is a mixture of boldness and simplicity. Very knowledgeable about horses, "she rides like an Amazon." "What," she exclaims, "you cannot shoe a horse, or cut his mane or tail?" There are many French words in the text—*Festin de Pierre*, *bienséance*, *fadeurs*, *cour plénière*, *tête-à-tête* and so on. We are given to understand that Diana's actions are mysteriously under the control of others, that she is a creature motherless, friendless and alone in the world, that she is well-accustomed to sacrifice

her friendships and comforts to the welfare of others, that she has even been condemned to a convent. Who can doubt that Charlotte Charpentier was the original of the heroines both of *St. Ronan's Well* and of *Rob Roy*?

The variations in the theme are not without interest. Scott, for the purpose of the narrative, changes parts with his lady-love. It is he, not she, who has lived in France, she, not he, who understands heraldry. Though she reads cantos from the *Divina Commedia* aloud, it seems to him that in some moods "the society of half a dozen clowns at whisk or clabbers would give her more pleasure than if Ariosto himself were to wake from the dead." After writing some two hundred pages, Scott by a great turn of the wrist suddenly transfers the story to Scotland, and the novel known as *Rob Roy* commences: it is in the author of *Waverley's* well-known idiom.

Redgauntlet (1824), another novel in which the patching is only too evident, must date in part from the eighteenth century. It carries on for over a third of its course in the old epistolary style of Richardson and then breaks into narrative headed "Chapter First." In the introductory paragraphs of this chapter Scott makes clear to us some of the difficulties that his besetting "rage for narration" involved him in.

"The advantage of laying before the reader, in the words of the actors themselves, the adventures which we must otherwise have narrated in our own, has given great popularity to the publication of epistolary correspondence, as practised by various great authors, and by ourselves in the preceding chapters. Nevertheless a genuine correspondence of this kind (and Heaven forbid it should in any respect be sophisticated by interpolations of our own!) can seldom be found to contain all in which it is necessary to instruct the reader for his full comprehension of

the story. Also it must often happen that various prolixities and redundancies occur in the course of an interchange of letters, which must hang as a dead weight on the progress of the narrative. To avoid this dilemma, some biographers have used the letters of the personages concerned, or liberal extract from them, to describe particular incidents, or express the sentiments which they entertained ; while they connect them occasionally with such portions of narrative as may serve to carry on the thread of the story.

It is thus that the adventurous travellers who explore the summit of Mont Blanc now move on through the crumbling snow-drift so slowly that their progress is almost imperceptible, and anon abridge their journey by springing over the intervening chasms which cross their path with the assistance of their pilgrim-staves. Or, to make a briefer simile, the course of story-telling which we have for the present adopted resembles the original discipline of the dragoons, who were trained to serve either on foot or horse-back as the emergencies of the situation required."

From these paragraphs alone we may deduce that *Redgauntlet* was an early experimental work. In referring to the novel, Lockhart tells us that he has no doubt whatever that Walter Scott drew his own portrait in Alan Fairford, that of his father, in Saunders Fairford, and that of his great friend William Clerk as Darsie Latimer. He also tells us that the Green Mantle episode was drawn from a secret attachment dating from 1790, when Walter Scott offered the shelter of his umbrella to his distant kinswoman, Williamina Belsches, as they met in the rain outside Greyfriars Church. Though she was but sixteen at the time he thought of her from that time on as his liege lady and, as Lockhart demurely observes, "the attachment continued through all the most perilous stage of life, to act as a romantic charm and safeguard of virtue."

It should be noted that the picture of Mr. Fairford in the

early epistolary part of this novel is less sympathetic than it subsequently becomes in the narrative wherein the old gentleman and his crotchets are described with a tenderness and a tolerance that suggest retrospection and experience of life. Many Latin tags are introduced into this book indicating, maybe, Scott's recent apprenticeship at the Bar.

V

So much for the novels of portraiture and personal experience. We must now look at certain other novels devoid, as far as we can ascertain, of autobiographical interest, in which the date of publication bears little if any relation to the date of composition. At the time of publication some of these were contrasted unfavourably with the more popular novels. Romances which for want of a better term we may designate as of mediaeval clerical interest, such as *The Fair Maid of Perth*, *The Betrothed*, *Castle Dangerous*, offer us problems peculiar to their composition, and to them we may perhaps usefully apply the test of knowledge.

If the author appears to know less in one novel than he does in another it may fairly be presumed that the less well-informed story was written earlier than the better-informed one. To illustrate this point we have but to use the gauge of his acquaintance with or his ignorance of the manners and customs of the Catholic Church. To any careful reader of this group of novels it is obvious that he knew a very great deal more about ecclesiastical matters when *The Monastery* was published in 1820 than he did when *The Fair Maid of Perth* (1828) or *Castle Dangerous* (1831) are alleged to have been written. In *The Monastery* he shows

himself familiar with the Decretals of Lanfranc, and the names and habits of the great Orders. He can describe their tunics and their scapularies, the organisation of a monastic house, the different varieties of bells in use (cymbalum, tympanum, etc.), knows the purpose served by the vestaria and misericord, sends his people to Vespers instead of High Mass in the evenings, no longer uses *Benedicite* in the sense of By Gad ! but as a salutation with a correct response. He has read what he calls the "penitentiary psalms," and knows more about the use of the rosary (though still apt to call the big beads "credos"), and has heard of the seven sacraments. In the other two novels mentioned above, he is innocent of all this information, for at the time he wrote them he had evidently not read Fosbroke's *British Monachism*, but had depended on Chaucer and his Canterbury Pilgrims for tuition in things ecclesiastical. A great change seems to have come over him when he bought Abbotsford, for he suddenly felt he had a stake in monastic life himself and began to read the *Vulgate*, *Roman Missal* and Fosbroke, and we may see the result of this reading reflected in the novels of 1819 and 1820. In comparison with these better-informed books the subsequently published *Betrothed*, *Fair Maid of Perth* and *Castle Dangerous* reveal crude defects.

In his earliest plunges into the life of the Middle Ages, Scott had soon found himself out of his depth. Tourneys, chivalrous deeds, castles, sieges and armour did not, he found, cover the life of those days, for at the back of everything was a strange, powerful entity to which much had to be referred. It was a dilemma to realise that an organisation of which he knew practically nothing pervaded every activity of public and private life if it did not actually underpin the very structure of society. Where knowledge

failed he was driven to invention which, as we shall presently see, landed him in occasional predicaments.

Up till Sir Walter's day the cloister décor had been used by the Monk Lewis-Mrs. Radcliffe school of writers as a background to spooky, dissolute or irreligious happenings. There had been no attempt to present it sensibly, and, as readers were prompt to swallow everything that made them shiver, the romancers got away with it without criticism. No English novelist before Scott had written about Catholics seriously or had introduced high-minded respectable papists into their books. Scott revived curiosity about Catholicism and, as Newman seems to have realised, paved the way for the acceptance of the Oxford Movement by interesting his readers in the Catholic past.

In Scott's youth no pre-Reformation Catholic church was operating in Britain. There were embassy chapels and private oratories and, after the Revolution in France, centres in which expatriated priests established themselves, but on the whole the severance with the past had been complete. It was not possible without an infinite expenditure of trouble to assist at any Catholic ceremony, and we must picture to ourselves an England from which all traces of Catholic practice had vanished, a Protestant island that had cut adrift from European life. The Church of Rome was as much of a back-number as the Pyramids of Egypt, and to Scott and the men of his generation as mysterious and remote a religious system as that of the Lamas of Tibet. Extensive ruins, though often impressive in size, beauty of window tracery or carved capitals of columns, were merely thought of as the rendezvous of light-hearted excursions and picnic parties ; they neither said anything nor meant anything to the pleasure-seekers unpacking their hampers of viands and

wine. Derelict abbeys were just "the ruins" and, as it were, an end in themselves.

The once-Catholic cathedrals of England surrounded by their quiet closes and the towns they brooded over had also become absorbed into the national scene. So identified were they with Protestant society that they had come to be regarded not in the light of their origin or the purposes for which their chancels and naves had been designed, but as official buildings staffed with a prosperous and well-educated state clergy, appointed mainly for political reasons, whose ladies set the tone in the provincial circles they queened over.

Though the English novel from Defoe to Scott reflects aspects of English life and English opinion, it reflects no facet of Catholicism as an integral factor in that life, for the Reformation-cum-spoliation had been amazingly thorough and it was hardly understood by any save students of history that England had ever been a Catholic country.

The first Catholic in English fiction appears on Robinson Crusoe's island. The thirty-seventh chapter ends with the description of a foreign ecclesiastic, "a grave, sober, pious and most religious person : exact in life : extensive in his charity, and exemplary in almost everything he did." He was a French Benedictine. "I was astonished at the sincerity and temper of this pious Papist," says Robinson Crusoe, who was delighted to enlist his help towards teaching Christianity to the pagan English, their coloured wives and children. A French Franciscan, Father Lorenzo, is introduced into *A Sentimental Journey*. He and Yorick meet in Calais and the priest at once infuses the necessary strangeness into the atmosphere. We know we are abroad. Sterne also has a Catholic in *Tristram Shandy* in the shape of Dr. Slop the

man-midwife. He is but four and a half feet high and proves to be a bigoted, unsympathetic creature. Richardson, in *Sir Charles Grandison*, portrays an Italian Bishop, a most respectable personage, and Fielding, in *Joseph Andrews*, produces a priest in the guise of a traveller sitting by the fire in the New Inn. He has just landed after a bad passage in which private property has been jettisoned and has not so much as a shilling on him. He wants to borrow 1s. 6d. from Parson Adams who also has nothing since his pocket has been picked. In Smollett's *Travels through France and Italy* we find a picture of a Scottish priest and of an unwashed little French Capuchin "who paid more adoration to a pretty girl than to the Virgin Mary." A priest steals Roderick's money in *The Adventures of Roderick Random* and a similar figure appears in *Peregrine Pickle*, both expressive of the English views of the time as to priestly rascality. In *Humphrey Clinker* there is an account of some Catholic missionaries qualifying for the crown of martyrdom. Borrow in *Lavengro* makes one of his characters assert that Scott was the tool of that diabolical conspiracy which infected old English Protestantism with the poison of Popery.

VI

In the light of this digression we will examine a novel produced in the last year of Sir Walter's life, *Castle Dangerous*. The circumstances that led up to its publication are easy to trace. The author was engaged on *Count Robert of Paris*, but finding the Byzantine scene but little to his taste, he broke off in order to complete a story about good Lord James, the Douglas knighted at Bannockburn, who had set

out to convey the Bruce's heart to the Holy Land. Lockhart, realising *Count Robert* to be hopeless rubbish, encouraged him in this and went with him to Douglasdale where they visited Castle Douglas and the deserted church of St. Bride with its cross-legged effigy of Lord James. After inspecting the piled lead coffins in the crypt, they were shown a significant silver case in the form of a heart.

“The bloody heart blazed in the van
Announcing Douglas' dreaded name.”

chanted Scott as they drove away. Scott was due to spend the night with Lockhart's brother, but he was in a fever to be back and writing. The plot of *Castle Dangerous*, not manifested till half-way through the book, is that Augusta de Berkeley (the narrator), a great heiress, is ward to Edward II of England. The King desires her to marry Piers Gaveston, but she, feeling that her money would be put to better use by brave Sir John de Walton, announces that she will give her hand to anyone who can hold Castle Dangerous for a year and a day. De Walton accepts the challenge. Presently she decides to join him in Scotland. Disguising herself as the son of the family minstrel, Bertram, and calling herself Augustine, she proceeds with him to Douglasdale. The novel proper begins at this point.

The travellers spend a night near the castle with Bertram's old friend, Thomas Dickson, and find the house full of English soldiers under command of Sir Aymer de Valence, lieutenant to de Walton. Augustine is lodged in the convent of St. Bride, and the minstrel goes to the castle where he finds the manuscript he wants and settles down to copy it, but de Walton, believing he must be a spy, arrests him. To clear himself Bertram sends word to Augustine

begging her to permit him to declare who they both are and why they are there. Augustine, meanwhile, who has been wandering in the adjacent forest with Sister Ursula, falls into the hands of Douglas and is held hostage. In the end all comes right, and after some ceremonial passages of arms de Walton marries the heiress Augusta de Berkeley.

Incidents and interests in this romance point to the book having been written while Scott was studying "Sir Tristrem" at Lasswade (1802-3), and there are constant allusions to Thomas of Ercildoune. The craftsmanship is so immature, and the ignorance of churches and ceremonies displayed so childish, as to stamp it nearly all as early work. The church of Douglas is described (the date being 1307) as a ruin, a "small portion of open space being retained for public worship in the family." The convent also is in ruins and but "two or three old monks and as many nuns" live there to give relief to Scottish travellers.

And it is not only in knowledge of matters ecclesiastical that Scott shows crudity. The language is jejune and pretentious. Sister Ursula in lay life was the Lady of Hautlieu. The loss of an eye that "roll'd a sightless luminary in her head" had made her very ugly though "the beams" of the other eye "irregularly lighted her seamed and scarred features." In walking in the forest with Augustine, she tells him that, if captured, "the Abbot will not shrink from inflicting on me the death of an apostate nun—which means being immured within four walls with a basket of bread and a cruse of water." This reminds us of the famous walling-up scene in *Marmion*. In re-writing the novel, or completing it, Scott realised that he has made the Lady of Hautlieu too ugly to be fallen in love with by the suitor he had found for her. So he submits her to beauty-parlour

treatment. "A long process of time employed under skilful hands succeeded in obliterating the scars," after which "the lone organ of sight" no longer appeared "so great a blemish," concealed as it was by a black ribbon and by a lock of hair. A tiny clue that may indicate the date at which *Castle Dangerous* was first hatched lies in a quotation from *Christabel* (1816), which is spelt as "Christabelle." Now John Stoddart, home from Malta in 1803, had told his host, Walter Scott, of a poem written by the secretary to the Governor that had impressed him. He could remember certain verses, and quoted a couplet as specially commendable.

"Hush beating heart of Christabel
Jesu Maria shield her well."

The lines by the unknown poet pleased Scott so much that he adapted them at once for his *Lay of the Last Minstrel* as,

"Deadly to hear and deadly to tell
Jesu Maria shield her well."

thereby earning the dislike of Coleridge who began to feel that he was "providing feathers for other men's caps."

VII

We will now step back from the year 1831 to the year 1825 when another very early novel, *The Betrothed*, was placed on the market, by being issued as a pair to *The Talisman* in the bracketed *Tales of the Crusaders*. It is as hard to read as *Castle Dangerous* though it deals with the same decade of years as *The Talisman*. The contrast between

the two books is very striking. The one pursues its zig-zag, amateur, fumbling course and the other swings along in an assured competence and mastery over language. James Ballantyne told the author that *The Betrothed* was "very badly written," and even John Buchan had to admit it to be "an indubitable failure." The story resembles that of the ballad of *The Noble Moringer*. Eveline de Berenger is the only daughter of Raymond de Berenger of Garde Douloureuse, in the Welsh Marches. An old enemy, Gwenyn the Wolf of Plinlimmon, is invited by Raymond to plan an expedition to the Holy Land. The Wolf comes, only to fall in love with Eveline. His suit is angrily rejected, for he is known to be a married man. Returning affronted to his own home Gwenyn applies for divorce, and then besieges Garde Douloureuse. Raymond de Berenger is killed in a sally, and his orphaned daughter, Eveline, rescued by Hugo de Lacy, Constable of Chester. Out of gratitude she affiances herself to him before he sets out on a crusade. When he returns he declares himself too war-worn to be a fit husband for a young girl and surrenders his rights to his nephew, Damian, with whom she is secretly in love.

The writing of this novel is of a very strange order as the following quotations will show. To describe a face

"with eyes starting from their sockets and a countenance from which the blood, with which it was so lately highly coloured, had retreated to garrison the heart."

is surely a little awkward, and the following paragraph may be dubbed clumsy in composition :

"Her task of dragging him forward might have reminded the spectator of some of those ancient monuments on which a small cherub, singularly inadequate to the task, is often

represented as hoisting up to the empyrean the fleshy bulk of some ponderous tenant of the tomb whose disproportioned weight bids fair to render ineffectual the benevolent and spirited exertions of its fluttering guide and assistant."

The Betrothed contains pointers of interest. Lady Ermen-garde of Baldringham with her all-Saxon household and anti-Norman prejudice is a recognisable forerunner of Cedric in *Ivanhoe* (1819). In its pages Scott indulges in one of his unsuccessful excursions into the domain of the supernatural, and we conclude that the Chamber of the Red Finger and the visit to the Abbess of Gloucester are put in to pad out the narrative. The book gives the impression of being experimental. One would hazard the guess that the manuscript was taken out of its drawer in 1824 when Scott was being chivied by taskmasters to repeat the successes he had had with *Ivanhoe* and *Quentin Durward*, and that he was re-fired by its perusal to write *The Talisman*.

[*The Fair Maid of Perth* may be an even earlier essay in dealing with the mediaeval world, as the country round Perth, where the scene of the novel is laid, is that described by Scott on his first visit to Alexander of Invernahayle, and much of the book is written by someone who is trying to find out how the people of the Middle Ages lived. The author is boyishly pleased to discover that if a man made gloves he would be called Glover, if arms—Smith, if a doctor—Leech. The uses of the baldrick and the hauberk divert him, he likes making people say s'Faith and *Benedicite*. Chunks of history are copied from some textbook and the writer has a sketch of the mediaeval lay-out of the town, for he knows the situation of every street and convent as he sets out to reconstruct life in the old burgh of St. Johnstown, alias Perth.

The story opens on St. Valentine's Day 1396 and ends on Palm Sunday of the same year. Robert III, grandson of the Bruce, is living in the Dominican convent in Perth ; Black Douglas at the monastery of Aberbrothock. All the big-wigs of Scotland, including the Earl of March and the heir to the throne, the Duke of Rothesay, and the Douglas are attending the King's Council. It has been hard to find quarters for them. The Black Douglas has forcibly billeted a thousand followers at the monastery ; the King's more modest retinue is at the convent. The heroine, daughter of the Glover, is made love to by the Duke of Rothesay, by Henry the Smith, and by an apprentice of her father's, the young Highland chieftain Connachar. Misled, possibly by Shakespeare and his famous mass at Verona when Juliet says, "Are you at leisure Holy Father now or shall I come to you at Evening Mass," Scott makes the Glover say, "It is holytide . . . it behoves us to go to evening service." They go to the church where,

"The ceremony of High Mass was performed with considerable solemnity, a number of noblemen and ladies being present . . . when the congregation were dismissed the Glover and his beautiful daughter lingered for some time for the purpose of making their several shrifts at the confessionals, where the priests had taken their places for discharging that part of their duties."

After the shriving they go out into the deserted streets, the night having "fallen dark."

As a reader of Chaucer, Scott had several ready-made types of religious to draw upon and could produce Father John in *Marmion* and the Clerk of Copmanhurst with ease. In *The Fair Maid of Perth* we meet the jovial monk of tradition, "a buxom priest, tipples a can on Easter even,

has a pleasant *in principio* and confesses all the prettiest women about the town." If a visit to the cloister was overhung with mystery even to Monk Lewis and Mrs. Radcliffe, is it any wonder that Scott found it difficult to conjecture what went on in the recesses of a religious house ! In the Dominican convent he describes a chapel, " decorated with a crucifix, before which burned four lamps, at sight of which all bent and crossed themselves."

Banquets in these experimental early novels have a way of resembling each other. In *The Fair Maid* a feast is given in memory of a chieftain lately dead at which a cup to the memory of the deceased is pledged, after which " a low murmur of benedictions was heard in the company while the monks, uplifting their united voices, sang *Requiem in eternam dona.*" At a banquet in *Castle Dangerous* " the priests hung their heads, looked deadly grave and muttered their paternosters."

The uncertainty displayed in this approach is very different from the assurance manifested in *Ivanhoe*, which produces a conjuror-like illusion of familiarity with Catholic practices. We have only to look at the confident way in which Scott orders a crucifix and a *Te igitur* to be brought for the Templar to swear on, to realise that he thought he had the hang of things at last. Though he sends Lady Rowena occasionally to " evening mass," he knows all about the duties of an eremite.

" I serve the duty of my chapel. Two masses daily morning and evening, primes, noons, aves, credos, paters."

In *The Talisman* he confidently leads us into a Gothic chapel hewn out of a rock. Six niches on either side of the aisle house the twelve apostles. Behind the altar is a rich

Persian hanging which, when lifted, reveals a cabinet of silver and ebony. The doors of the cabinet fly open showing a large piece of wood on which are blazoned the words *Vera Crux* while a choir of female voices sings the *Gloria Patri*. As the curtain falls a bell, such as is rung at the elevation of the Host, tinkles. Presently the relic reappears, lauds are sung by the same female voices, and a procession enters the chapel. Four beautiful bronzed eastern boys with snow-white tunics lead it. The first pair carry censers, the second flowers. Six nuns, with black scapularies and black veils worn over white tunics, follow, and then a company of novices in white veils. The nuns carry large rosaries, the novices chaplets of red and white roses. All glide three times round the chapel moving amidst clouds of incense. They disappear through a door and the lights go out.

How can anyone believe that the glib account of this strange ceremonial was written earlier than the Palm Sunday observances in *Castle Dangerous* or the convent scene in *The Fair Maid of Perth*? Such faith would be proof that the reader had never compared the novels with each other, but, like many people of Scott's day, had taken them on trust. John Buchan, in a rather hedging appreciation, maintains that *The Fair Maid* "shows no signs of weakening power." This is of course true, since though poor, it is not senile, and must be classed as the work of an adolescent, of a waxing rather than of a waning mentality. The sentence building is often laborious and the plentiful and ripe reflections on life that distinguish the mature novels as yet undiscernible. It is written by someone with no experience of living. *The Fair Maid* (1828) was followed by *Anne of Geierstein* (1829), complement from the Burgundian side to *Quentin Durward*.

“I am hard up as far as imagination is concerned,” wrote the poor toiler in February 1828. He must have found it terribly trying to write and write to order, but pulling himself together he finished *The Fair Maid* in March and handed it over to his tormentors, Cadell and Ballantyne. Scott then resumed his meditations on Burgundian history. Over this at least he need not hurry, for he has given his publishers something to sell. He can re-read *Quentin Durward* quietly and pick up the threads of the period in his own time.

VIII

We will now turn to Scott's two post-Reformation novels, (*The Monastery* (1820) and *The Abbot* (1820), which immediately succeeded *Ivanhoe*. In both he displays familiarity with matters ecclesiastical. He has read *British Monachism* and he knows something of the habits of monks. The midday feast—the meridian—that compensates for early rising, the abstinence-breaking “*viatorum licitum est*.” He quotes the *Te Deum* and *Intravit in secretis nostris*, showing that he had by this time acquired the Latin version of the psalms mentioned in his diary. He knew the *Stabat Mater* by heart, and what deep impression the Latin hymns had made upon him we realise as he repeated them when he lay dying. He has studied the constitution of the Orders and especially that of the Benedictines, reformed on the rule of St. Bernard.

We may ask why this sudden interest in the habits of the cloister, but it is not difficult to account for. From the moment Scott settled down by the bank of the Tweed and decided to rename his recently acquired property after a

ford in the adjacent river (which he was certain was the pilgrim route from the north to the great Abbey of Melrose) his point of view changed. In some obscure way he began to feel himself bound up with the *genius loci* and in a measure the guardian of past traditions. The religion that claimed the devotion of his prime hero, Robert Bruce, and of his pet priest-historian, Froissart, was worth studying and there must be something in the faith that inspired men to raise and to embellish the great churches he so much admired.

In trying to find out what he could about monasteries he lighted on a book published in Douai in 1626, a very hard book for a Protestant layman to understand. It was entitled *Dissertatio Historia de Antiquitate Ordinis Congreg : Monachorum Nigrorum S. Benedicte in Regno Angliae*. Securing a copy of it for the Abbotsford library, he studied it carefully and from it developed the idea of pretending that both *The Monastery* and *The Abbot* were derived from Benedictine sources.

Delighted with the notion of perpetrating a new hoax on the public, he arranged to sponsor both novels elaborately in the manner reminiscent of *The Castle of Otranto*. Horace Walpole, it will be remembered, says that he found his romance on "a manuscript printed in black letter in Naples in the year 1589": Scott invents an archaeologist who shows a Benedictine from overseas the Abbey of Kennaquhair (Melrose) and permits him to remove from its precincts a porphyry box which has lain "for centuries" behind the Avenel and Glendinning monument. The archaeologist is rewarded for his complaisance by the gift of a Benedictine manuscript purporting to describe the locality and its inhabitants in the sixteenth century.

Having thus placed the responsibility for the story on

other shoulders, Scott did not trouble in *The Monastery* to arrange his history accurately. It was rather a case of "hab nab at a venture," and we get little notion of what was really happening in the Scotland of that date, for his background is both confused and confusing. Roughly speaking, Scott was endeavouring to show the effect of the Reformation on the Halidome of Melrose, the family conflicts that ensued on change of faith and the generally unsettled nature of land tenure after the invasion of Hertford and the English victory of Pinkie Cleugh.

The tale appears to end in 1559, the year before the saying of mass became a penal offence in Scotland. As a narrative it is somewhat rambling and there is no hero or heroine of sufficient interest to carry the story forward and intensify the action. Lockhart rather ambiguously tells us that "*The Monastery* was designed to have contained some supernatural agency, arising out of the fact that Melrose had been the place of deposit of the great Bruce's heart. The writer shrank, however, from filling up in this particular the sketch as it was originally traced." And yet, in spite of what Lockhart says, this is the story in which the White Lady of Avenel plays a considerable role, purloining a Bible, restoring it again, upsetting monks into the ford and generally acting in the interests of the reformers! The White Lady is in her way even a greater failure and more of an interloper than Sir Piercie Shafton, an Elizabethan Euphuist set back into the reign of Edward VI, who is a mere pastiche stuck on to the original lay-out of the novel. The author excuses his tangled presentation of incident and character by blaming it on the Benedictine manuscript. "I have in vain," he says, "endeavoured to ascertain the precise period of the story, as the dates cannot be exactly reconciled with those of the

accredited histories.” And indeed they cannot, since the fate of the Abbeys was unlike anything depicted by Scott in this book. It is a matter of common knowledge that after the rejection of the marriage proposals for affiancing the infant Edward VI with the infant Mary of Scotland, Henry VIII had sent Hertford to the north to invade and harry southern Scotland in an expedition that has always been known as “the English Wooing.”

In 1545, *i.e.*, before the novel opens at all, Hertford had pillaged the Abbeys of Dryburgh, Jedburgh, Kelso and Melrose, and it was not till after the battle of Pinkie Cleugh (1547) and the subsequent peace with England (1549) that the monasteries began to function once again, albeít in a denuded state, the Regency of Arran (Duc de Chatelherault) and the influence of France alone making this possible.

When, in 1555, Mary of Guise succeeded Arran as Regent her authority rested on the muskets of French soldiers, and Catholicism became identified in the popular mind with foreign domination. We learn nothing of this situation in *The Monastery*, nor are we informed, though “the Queen” is vaguely alluded to, of the terrible edicts promulgated against Catholics in 1560, when Protestantism was established by law and Papal jurisdiction abolished. We meander through the novel with never a suspicion of the tragic happenings that went on when the celebration of Mass and attendance thereat were punishable by death, and the lands of the great Orders were confiscated to endow the Protestant establishment. All we hear about is of the comings and goings of Avenels, Glendinnings and monks. To criticise the story, however, is not our immediate concern, except in so far as it enables us to form an opinion on the knowledge of Catholicism displayed in it. Perhaps it will

suffice for our purpose to reproduce the description of a religious procession which may be compared with other processions in "later" novels.

"The great gate of the Abbey was flung open, and the procession moved slowly forward from beneath its huge and richly adorned gateway. Cross and banner, pix and chalice, shrines containing relics, and censers steaming with incense, preceded, and were intermingled with, the long and solemn array of the brotherhood in their long black gowns and cowls, with their white scapularies hanging over them, the various officers of the convent each displaying his proper badge of office. In the centre of the procession came the Abbot, surrounded and supported by his chief assistants. He was dressed in a habit of high solemnity, and appeared as much unconcerned as if he had been taking his usual part in some ordinary ceremony. After him came the inferior persons of the convent; the novices in their albs and the lay brethren distinguished by their beards."

Fosbroke's *British Monachism* had really been a godsend to Scott, for he could squeeze no actuality out of his Douai treatise and here was an English clergyman providing him with all the detail he needed to enable him to complete the picture he had roughed out on paper. Vague indeed were his notions of the cloistered life till he got hold of this quarto on the *Manners and Customs of the Monks and Nuns of England*, which made everything so normal and straightforward. We know that he obtained a copy of the book (the second edition) in 1817, and it seems probable that in the excitement he felt in devouring it he completed *The Monastery*.

In *The Abbot*, which is set ten years after the conclusion of *The Monastery*, conventual life plays but a small part. There is, however, a kind of continuity between the books

since the new Abbot of 1567-8 is Edward, the brother of Halbert Glendinning. Incidentally he is represented as ruling over a monastery some years after his life would have been forfeited by so doing. To enliven his narrative Scott introduces the Feast of Fools or Unreason, a scene copied from the pages of Fosbroke. Then he whisks everybody off to Edinburgh and Loch Leven Castle, where henceforth we jostle against a lay company including Murray, Morton, the Queen and her suite. It is all much more like one of the pageant novels than *The Monastery*, for it deals with great affairs and presents historical characters. In *The Monastery* he had allowed himself to be seduced by Fosbroke's narrative to believe that what he himself found so entertaining and exciting would prove the same to others.

The comparative failure of *The Monastery* made Scott realise that to recapture public sympathy he must introduce into the sequel some one commanding figure. It was clear that the Glendinnings, the Avenels, Father Abbot, Father Eustace and the rest were too insignificant and devoid of general interest to beguile anyone to read what happened to them in later life. *The Abbot* was therefore shored up with the kind of Scottish history that was familiar to all, and Mary, Queen of Scots, a figure sufficiently tragic, lovely and well-known to redeem any historical novel, was made to play an important part in the story of which attractive, high-spirited Catherine Seaton is the heroine. Much of the narrative was written at Blair Adam whence Loch Leven could be plainly seen. When completed, a copy of *The Abbot* reached Lockhart with a slip inscribed by Sir Walter with these words :

“Up he rose in a funk, lapped a toothful of brandy
And to it again ! any odds upon Sandy !

Though *The Monastery* had been a comparative failure he had no doubt as to the popular appeal of *The Abbot*.

IX

From Abbotsford Scott frequently went over to Melrose, and every time he pottered about that ruined shell and uncovered fragments of stone carvings hidden in the rank grass, he found something that went to his heart, something he wanted to take home, and then, as he lifted his eyes to the palm-like vaulting and the elegant traceries of window and niche, he could not but regret the despoilment. And the people who built these beautiful places, could they have been as depraved and stupid as they were made out to be by the reformers? Moved by veneration of the past he insisted on introducing copies of gothic ornament into his dream palace, Abbotsford. Statues of St. Peter and St. Paul, nuns' heads, and a traceried fireplace as well as copies of the pendentives in Roslin Chapel were included in the décor. But he was foiled in one intention, for a statue of Our Lady acquired by him and intended to be placed suitably in his house, had to be lodged, by ex-Catholic Lady Scott's express desire, in a niche in Melrose Abbey.

The more Sir Walter cogitated over the monastic system the more advantages he saw in it. For one thing it limited the power and wealth of the nobles, lessened the chances of internecine strife, and strengthened the authority of the King. He admired conventual methods of management and cultivation. Those large-scale cultivators, with their well-thought-out system of irrigation, of ploughing, trenching, tree-pruning, vegetable growing and fish rearing, appealed

to the Laird of Abbotsford who in many respects found their life and their practical problems so like his own. They, too, preserved apples against the winter and their "orcharder" gathered the fruit and disposed it on layers of straw; their *porcarius* was concerned with pig-breeding and bacon-curing; they, too, had a cowman to run their *vaccaris*. In reading of these beneficent pastoral interests Sir Walter found himself entering in spirit into monastic life and entirely ceasing to disapprove of these kindly, busy people who, after all, had reclaimed, as he was doing at the moment, wild land for cultivation. Public benefactors they certainly were, disposing as they did of a princely revenue of £100,000 a year. The men who administered these funds were often, he discovered, well-born cadets of great houses and not so unlike the Fellows of All Souls whom he had always heard alluded to as *bene nati, bene vestiti, et mediocriter docti*. The Abbots, too, had been very important people and the equal of any temporal lord. In old days the Lord Abbots of Melrose had kept open house in Edinburgh during the parliamentary sessions, and in the country were immensely hospitable to all who claimed hospitality. There were moments when Scott had the illusion that their mantle had fallen on his shoulders and he felt himself almost abbatial in hospitality. Nevertheless, with all this understanding of the way in which Scotland had been civilised by Catholic efforts he managed to combine an up-to-date political horror of "Popery" as a depraving superstition. However, when the Catholic Emancipation Bill was under discussion he modified his attitude for he regarded it as a more expedient measure than the quite horrifying Reform Bill!

X

Enough has now been said to show that the "later" mediaeval novels must in composition have preceded the "earlier" novels by some years. We can make no attempt to assign them to a particular moment in time, but the very fact that Scott wrote them shows that he was ceaselessly experimenting in every description of literature. By the year *Waverley* was published (1814) he must have had large stocks of written material to draw on. *Waverley* (save for its first few chapters, complete by 1805) is, as we know, characteristic of Scott at his most idiomatic, but even so its author had no intention of acknowledging that the book was written by him unless it proved a success. An incognito was necessary in issuing empirical work and might prove a most valuable shield against hostile criticism.

We may now take it for granted that Scott, like all other writers, was always everything at once, that he practised himself in story-telling, verse and prose from the earliest age, and that he found himself obliged to undertake an enormous amount of tentative work before finding his own method of presentation.

The novels that give the impression of having been written *currente calamo*, off the reel, as it were, are often judged to be his best, though they are far from being the most interesting. They embrace *The Antiquary* (1815), *Old Mortality* (1816), *Heart of Midlothian* (1818), *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), *Ivanhoe* (1820), *Kenilworth* (1821), *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822), *Peveril of the Peak* (1823), and *Quentin Durward* (1823). Nine full-dress novels in eight years: enough surely to have made the old school of Scott idolators burst with pride.

Three novels not included in this list of masterpieces are *The Talisman*, *Woodstock* and *Anne of Geierstein*, which being, as it were, projections from earlier novels on the same subjects—*Ivanhoe*, *Kenilworth*, *Quentin Durward*—proved less interesting and less powerful in their general appeal. They were all forced upon the author by his taskmasters who, towards the end of his career, were for ever urging him to try and repeat old successes. One other mature novel, *The Pirate*, stands in a class by itself. It was purely a novel of circumstance written, after close study (for review purposes) of Icelandic sagas and Nordic legends, during his yachting trip with the Commissioners of Northern Lights in the summer of 1814. Scott's companions, observing how hard he was writing and how frequently he paced the deck muttering to himself, left him as undisturbed as possible while he noted down the contours of headland and inlet in the Shetland Isles. The book was laid aside when Scott returned to Edinburgh, and only made its appearance, incongruously enough, between *Kenilworth* and *The Fortunes of Nigel*. Its moment of publication served to give an extraordinary impression of versatility to the author of *Waverley's* output and produced the magical effect he desired to convey. Who after reading *The Pirate* could possibly forecast to what subject or period of time the Wizard of the North would next turn his attention? A writer in *The Edinburgh Review* carps at the fact that *The Pirate* should appear at Christmas and be followed at Whitsuntide by *The Fortunes of Nigel*. He feels that it is quite vain to expect the author to stay his course, but should he not be firmly reminded that a literary reputation, unless it increases, must diminish?

In the nine full-dress novels already listed Sir Walter shows

himself as a master of his craft, he writes flowingly and often so carelessly as to provoke the irritation of reviewers, but there are no apparent patches or seams : in all of them he runs true to formula and to style. *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822) is as good an example as any of a continuous, unworked-over novel in which Scott savours his subject and treats us in his mature authentic idiom to long conversations of the kind he most enjoyed providing, and during the course of which he makes known to us a host of characters. Much of it is in Scottish dialect, two or three pages of talk with James I in Latin. The portrayal of the king is esteemed faithful to life and characteristic of the man Sully dubbed "The wisest fool in Christendom." The King, however, makes few appearances, and the greater part of the story is taken up with the adventures of rather a dull young man, Nigel Oliphant, Lord Glenvarloch. The novel is book-making *in excelsis*, and those who best understand Scott swear that the craftsmanship is superlative. Scottish writers like John Buchan and Sir Herbert Grierson laud the portrait of James I as a masterpiece of presentation and historic truth. Less informed persons, Sydney Smith for example, who was fifty when it came out, called the plot execrable, but the Canon's opinion would not have carried much weight with a Scott idolator at any time. Critics of Scott's own day found Nigel "less interesting than even most of his insipid predecessors,"¹ but then the anonymous writer deplored the fact that all the heroes of the Waverley novels were virtuous and passive. The plot may be summarized as follows : Nigel Oliphant, threatened with the loss of his ancestral estate if he is unable instantly to redeem a heavy mortgage, comes to London to try and extract from

¹ *Edinburgh Review*, 1822.

James I the sum of 40,000 merks lent to him by Nigel's father. The first third of the book is taken up by prolonged discussions with George Heriot, goldsmith of Lombard Street, who, having known Nigel's father, would like to help him. He is aware that schemers wish to seize the estate and desire that Nigel should go seek his fortunes abroad. Heriot advises him to present himself at Court, and lends him £100 for the outfit. In this early part of the novel we also get to know the King's Horologer, David Ramsay, and his apprentices Vincent and Tunstall. Of these and other subaltern figures there are long descriptions.

George Heriot goes to Court to exhibit a "piece of valuable workmanship"—an embossed salver by Benvenuto Cellini, depicting the Judgment of Solomon. The King does not keep him waiting, but admits him at once and greets him in a friendly way as "Jingling Geordie." The King is in his cabinet surrounded by a medley of folios, paintings and ornaments. At this point comes the much-praised picture of his royal patron.

"The King's dress was of green velvet, quilted so full as to be dagger-proof, which gave him the appearance of clumsy and ungainly protuberance; whilst its being buttoned awry communicated to his figure an air of distortion. Over his green doublet he wore a sad-coloured night-gown, out of the pocket of which peeped his hunting horn. His high-crowned grey hat lay on the floor covered with dust, but encircled by a coronet of large balas rubies; and he wore a blue velvet nightcap in front of which was placed the plume of a heron."

Why so dusty? Why so badly valeted? we wonder. The King admires the salver and buys it. Heriot then presents a supplication from Lord Glenvarloch. Follows a

good gossip pointed with strange oaths such as "God's bread!" "Ods fish!" "Ods death!" The King tells Heriot to let Nigel have £200, but Jingling Geordie has done business with His Majesty before and insists on a written order for the same and a deposit of a crown ruby and diamond.

Among the well-known characters in the novel are Sir Mungo Malagrowth, treacherous and embittered courtier; Dame Suddlechop, wife of a Fleet Street barber, who is a milliner and the secret agent to whom the heroine, Margaret Ramsay, confides her love for Nigel; and miser Trapbois and his daughter.

It transpires that the Oliphaunt estate is coveted by Prince Charles and the Duke of Buckingham, and that their friend, Lord Dalgarno, has been instructed to lure Nigel into evil ways, keep him from court and spread evil reports about him. Nigel, finding this out, challenges Dalgarno in St. James's Park and strikes him, an offence for which he is liable to lose his right hand. He takes refuge in Alsatia, the court name for the precinct of Whitefriars in London, which, until it was abolished in 1697, was sanctuary for debtors and law breakers. The name was taken from Alsace, "the debatable land between France and Germany." This strange and lawless society Scott revels in describing. When Nigel, after an adventure, gets out of Alsatia he finds himself in the Tower. Margaret Ramsay meanwhile has taken secret steps to secure his freedom. In the guise of a page she seeks an interview with the King both on Nigel's behalf and on that of her patroness, Lady Hermione, wronged by her husband, Lord Dalgarno. Her self-imposed mission is successful and as a result Nigel is interviewed by the King at Greenwich, recovers his estate and marries Margaret.

Dalgarno appropriately meets his death at the hands of robbers as he is on his way to Scotland to seize the Oliphaunt property.

XI

The Bride of Lammermoor is said by Lockhart to have been for the most part dictated under the influence of opium to Willie Laidlaw and John Ballantyne, but this is irreconcilable with the fact that the manuscript (except for some pages at the conclusion) preserved in the library of Writers to the Signet is in Sir Walter's own handwriting. Set about eighty years later than *The Fortunes of Nigel*, *The Bride* was published two years earlier. It tells the story of the Byronic Master of Ravenswood who had inherited from his father, Lord Ravenswood, his hatred for Sir William Ashton, the Lord Keeper, who had by some legal chicanery deprived him of his title and estate in East Lothian as a penalty for the part he had played in the civil war of 1689. Lord Ravenswood died in a fit of fury against the author of his ruin. He bequeaths to his son the ruined tower of Wolf's Crag, his last remnant of property. The picture of Wolf's Crag is characteristic of Scott in his maturity.

“The roar of the sea had long announced their approach to the cliffs, on the summit of which, like the nest of some sea eagle, the founder of the fortalice had perched his eyrie. The pale moon, which had hitherto been contending with flitting clouds, now shone out, and gave them a view of the solitary and naked tower, situated on a projecting cliff that beetled on the German Ocean. On three sides the rock was precipitous; on the fourth, which was that towards the land, it had been originally fenced by an artificial ditch and drawbridge, but the latter was broken down and ruinous, and the former had been

in part filled up, so as to allow a passage for a horseman into the narrow courtyard, encircled on two sides with offices and stables partly ruinous, and closed on the landward front by a low embattled wall, while the remaining side of the quadrangle was occupied by the tower itself which, tall and narrow, and built of greyish stone, stood glimmering in the moonlight, like the sheeted spectre of some huge giant. A wilder or more disconsolate dwelling it was perhaps difficult to conceive. The sombrous and heavy sound of the billows successively dashing against the rocky beach at a profound distance beneath, was to the ear what the landscape was to the eye—a symbol of unvaried and monotonous melancholy, not unmingled with horror.”

Chance leads the Master of Ravenswood to save the life of Sir William Ashton and of his daughter Lucy, with whom he falls in love. When political changes raise the friends of Ravenswood to power, cautious Sir William Ashton thinks it may be well to conciliate the Master. This he does so effectively that thoughts of vengeance are banished from Ravenswood’s mind and he becomes secretly engaged to Lucy. At this point Lady Ashton turns up and dismisses Ravenswood, who goes abroad. Lady Ashton tries to persuade and then to force her daughter to marry a suitor of her choosing, the Laird of Bucklaw. Lucy appears to yield to her wishes, but stipulates that she be allowed to write to Ravenswood to obtain his consent to the breaking of their engagement. The letter is intercepted and read by the wrong people and Lucy, receiving no reply, comes to think her lover has deserted her. She therefore consents to fix her wedding day with Bucklaw. Immediately after the ceremony Ravenswood reappears and challenges both Lucy’s brother and Lucy’s husband to duels on the morrow. That night Lucy stabs her husband, is found insane, and dies.

Unlike *Ivanhoe*, which stops but has no real ending, *The*

Bride of Lammermoor has an unforgettable conclusion. Ravenswood has ridden off to his duel with Lucy's brother.

"Colonel Ashton, frantic for revenge, was already in the field, pacing the turf with eagerness and looking with impatience towards the tower for the arrival of his antagonist. The sun had now risen, and showed its broad disc above the eastern sea, so that he could easily discern the horseman who rode towards him with speed which argued impatience equal to his own. At once the figure became invisible, as if it had melted into air. He rubbed his eyes as if he had witnessed an apparition and then hastened to the spot, near which he was met by Balderston, who came from the opposite direction. No trace of horse or rider could be discerned; it only appeared that the late winds and high tides had greatly extended the usual bounds of the quicksand, and that the unfortunate horseman, as appeared from the hoof tracks, in his precipitate haste had not attended to keep on the firm sands on the foot of the rock, but had taken the shortest and most dangerous course. Only one vestige of his fate appeared. A large sable feather had been detached from his hat, and the rippling waves of the rising tide wafted it to Caleb's feet.

The old man took it up, dried it, and placed it in his bosom."

The story is romance unadulterated and by many judges is considered the most perfectly contrived of all the novels. It is the only unrelieved tragedy Scott ever wrote.

XII

(We will now glance at another all-of-a-piece novel—one of the pageant series—*Kenilworth*, which originated in Constable's wish for an Elizabethan romance with the Armada as the principal incident. Scott, while agreeing to set his story in Elizabethan days, refused to include the

Armada as part of its build-up and made the ballad of Cumnor Hall the core of his tale. He opens with a scene in the Black Bear Tavern at Cumnor, very good of its kind and serving to introduce a motley throng of characters. Based on the traditions of the tragic fate of Amy Robsart, daughter of Sir Hugh Robsart of Devon, it tells of how the girl had been enticed by design of the villainous Richard Varney into a secret marriage with his patron the Earl of Leicester. In order to marry Elizabeth's favourite, she had rejected the suit of a worthy Cornish gentleman, Edmund Tressilian, an adherent of Leicester's rival, the Earl of Sussex. Leicester has been forced to keep his marriage a strict secret on pain of incurring the displeasure of the jealous Queen. Amy is accordingly mewed up at Cumnor Place, an old country house near Oxford, and is believed by Tressilian to be living as the paramour of Varney. Tressilian, after vainly trying to persuade Amy to return to her father, lays before the Queen a charge of seduction against Varney who, to shield Leicester, declares Amy to be his wife. Elizabeth has planned shortly to go to Kenilworth as the guest of Leicester, and to that place she orders Amy to repair. Varney, for purposes of his own, advises Leicester that the girl must appear at Kenilworth during the revels as Lady Varney, his wife. Amy meanwhile, aided by Tressilian, makes her way secretly to Kenilworth to demand recognition as Leicester's Countess. Obtaining access to the castle, she sees Leicester and persuades him to acknowledge her as his legal wife, an avowal that provokes the furious anger of the Queen. Varney, misrepresenting the relations of Amy and Tressilian, induces Leicester to believe his wife guilty of infidelity to him. In a passion Leicester orders Varney to remove Amy to Cumnor Place and there to kill her. The true facts are

revealed too late, and Tressilian arrives at Cumnor only to find that Amy, owing to the machinations of Varney, has fallen through a trap-door and perished.

Among the more arresting features of the novel are the descriptions of the Court of Elizabeth with the young Raleigh coming into favour, a scene at Greenwich between Leicester and Sussex in the Queen's presence, and the revels at Kenilworth. Wayland Smith, who aids Tressilian in his attempts to save the unfortunate Amy, and Dickie Sludge or Flibbertigibbet, the impish friend and assistant, also deserve mention.

There are inaccuracies in the tale as everyone must realise. Dudley's marriage to Amy Robsart was no secret ; it had been publicly celebrated in the reign of Edward VI. Amy's death is post-dated by many years so that she may meet Elizabeth at Kenilworth. Shakespeare is spoken of at Court when he was a small boy at Stratford, but this re-weaving of history does not prevent *Kenilworth* from being bracketed with *Ivanhoe* as one of Scott's most typical and vividly successful novels.

XIII

The dullest of the mature novels is *Peveril of the Peak*. In his prefatory letter to the book Scott admits to having fetched the Countess of Derby out of the cold grave in which she had lain for twenty years, and to making her a Catholic instead of a Huguenot. Though written in the authentic idiom it shows signs of fatigue and much of it is mere verbiage. The author knew it was not good and apologised for other defects than mere anachronisms. The

scene is set in 1678, the time of the pretended Popish Plot, though only in Chapter XIV is this theme reached. Sir Geoffrey Peveril, an old Cavalier, and Major Bridgnorth, a fanatical Puritan, are neighbouring landowners in Derbyshire, and though very different in interests have been knit by their experiences in the Civil War. It has the same Montagu-Capulet interest as *The Bride of Lammermoor*. Peveril's son Julian and Alice Bridgnorth are deeply in love with each other, but the parents have once again been brought into acute conflict by the Popish Plot. Julian, who has spent some years in the household of the Countess of Derby, Queen of the Isle of Man, goes to England on her service. He arrives to find his father arrested by Bridgnorth as a suspected Papist, attempts to liberate him and is himself arrested. He is presently freed by Derbyshire miners and goes to London. Alice meanwhile has been carried thither by her uncle, Christian, who hopes with the help of Chiffinch to bring her to the King's notice. In her service he has placed Fenella, his own daughter by a Moorish woman. She is ostensibly a deaf-mute, lovely enough to worm any secret from any employer. Alice, who falls into the hands of Buckingham, is rescued by her agency, and Julian (with whom Fenella is in love) is by her action brought to the notice of the King, incurs the hostility of his master, is imprisoned and accused of participation in the Plot. Julian is acquitted by the intervention of the King, who shows some sense of obligation to his father for his services in the Royal cause. There is an elaborate portrait of Charles II in this book, not nearly so good as that of James I in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, and another of the Duke of Buckingham. There are also glimpses of Titus Oates, Colonel Blood and Sir Geoffrey Hudson, Henrietta Maria's dwarf, whose picture hangs at

Hampton Court. Goethe thought Fenella developed on the pattern of Mignon, but objected to her mumming as a deaf-mute.

Peveril of the Peak, which had been a matter of dreariest toil for its author, was followed by vital, glancing *Quentin Durward*, as brilliant an example of Scott at his best as *Ivanhoe*.

Quentin Durward, a real *tour de force*, since with nothing to help him but Comines' *Memoirs*, a gazetteer and a map of Touraine, Scott had managed to produce a picture of Louis XI of France and his age that was recognised all over Europe and especially in France as authentic and convincing. The hero of the novel is a young Scot of the Scottish Archer Corps in the service of Louis XI. The scene is laid in the fifteenth century, and as far as public affairs are concerned, the book deals with the intrigues of Louis XI and his enemy vassal, Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy. One of the highlights of the narrative is the visit by Louis to Charles at Peronne and their temporary reconciliation. Philippe de Comines, Cardinal La Balue, Tristan l'Hermite and Nostradamus are among the best-known figures taking part in the action of the story, and it need not worry anyone to know that the soothsayer was not born till after Louis XI's death. *Quentin Durward*, though far from being an immediate success in Scotland, swept the Continent and, in the end, its country of origin, but Scott had bad moments about its circulation just after publication and wrote to Cadell, "I am sorry to find our friend *Quentin Durward* is somewhat frost-bit which I did not expect."

In *Ivanhoe* Scott broke new ground in England. The story goes forward in the reign of Richard I and is most definitely fiction, not history. The writer was in a sense

almost too widely read in mediaeval chronicles and had the customs of at least three centuries to draw on in his mind. Robin Hood, for instance, lived a hundred years later ; Cedric and Athelstan are incredible figures for the date : Edward the Confessor left no descendants ; Ulrica is centuries out of focus and her gods unknown to any British pantheon. But we must bear in mind that though it may savour in places of tushery, romance is always a revolt against the tyranny of facts.

The story centres on two great events, the first the tournament at Ashby-de-la-Zouche in which Ivanhoe, aided by Richard Cocur de Lion (who has returned unbeknown from abroad), defeats all the knights of John's party, including Sir Brian de Bois-Guilbert and Sir Reginald Front de Boeuf, and the second the siege of Front de Boeuf's stronghold, Torquilstone. The latter scene is borrowed from a work by Goethe, *Goetz von Berlichingen*, which Scott had translated in his early days. Mediaeval England is all a wonderful pageant-land to Sir Walter, peopled with armoured and wimpled persons, but he conveys the feeling that it is a bustling world, modern except for turns of speech. Episode follows episode—the feast in Cedric's Hall, the revels of the Black Knight and Friar Tuck, the death of Front de Boeuf, Ivanhoe's last contest with Bois-Guilbert, this knight's unbelievable end and Athelstan raised from the dead (at the instance of James Ballantyne). It is a well-managed, admittedly artificial plot and the book won a resounding success, for it is first and last a boy's book, opening up exciting horizons to the young.

The remaining three of the all-of-a-piece novels are set in Scotland and, naming them backwards in time, are *Heart of Midlothian* (1817), *Old Mortality* (1816) and *The*

Antiquary (1815). They are all concerned with Scottish affairs and life.

The *Heart of Midlothian*, by which name the old Tolbooth prison in Edinburgh was known, was the centre of the Porteous riots of 1736. Porteous, commander of the City Guard, had ordered his men to fire on the crowd on the occasion of the hanging of one Wilson, a convicted smuggler. When Wilson was reprieved citizens broke into the Tolbooth, carried Porteous out and hanged him. The mob was led by Robertson, friend of Wilson and lover of Effie Deans who lies in the Tolbooth on a charge of murdering her child. The attack on the prison would, it was hoped, facilitate her escape. Effie, however, refuses to escape, stands her trial and is sentenced to death. Her sister Jeanie sets out on foot for London and through the Duke of Argyll obtains an interview with Queen Caroline, who grants her sister Effie a pardon. Effie marries the father of her child, Robertson, who turns out to be Sir George Staunton in disguise. Her child has never been murdered but kidnapped and brought up as an unbaptized illiterate vagabond answering to the name of "Whistler." In the end Whistler and his master, Donocha Dhu, who are on their way to rob a manse, encounter Sir George Staunton and his friend, Butler, walking from Caird's Cove to the same manse. "Shots were fired and swords drawn on both sides ; Sir George Staunton offered the bravest resistance till he fell, as there was too much reason to believe, by the hand of a son so long sought and now at length so unhappily met." Thus feebly will Scott end a story in which he has lost interest.

This novel is a great favourite with Scottish people, who especially admire the rock-like character of Jeanie Deans and the description of the interview with Queen Caroline. If

it were not for the dialect and the fact that many pages of the narrative are sheer padding, added at Ballantyne's instance to bring the book up to four-volume length, one would agree with Thomas Seccombe that it may rank among "the greatest of all the Waverleys."

Among its many admirable descriptive passages is that on the view of Edinburgh from Salisbury Crag, which must remind many readers of the almost equally good account in *Old Mortality* of the view from Tillietudlem Castle. Scott revelled in panoramas of this kind.

"If I were to choose a spot from which the rising or setting sun could be seen to the greatest possible advantage, it would be that wild path winding round the foot of the high belt of semicircular rocks, called Salisbury Crag, and marking the verge of the steep descent which slopes down into the glen on the south-eastern side of the city of Edinburgh. The prospect, in its general outline, commands a close-built, high-piled city, stretching itself out beneath in a form which to a romantic imagination may be supposed to represent that of a dragon; now a noble arm of the sea, with its rocks, isles, distant shores, and boundary of mountains; and now a fair and fertile champaign country, varied with hill, dale, and rock, and skirted by the picturesque ridge of the Pentland mountains. But as the path gently circles round the base of the cliffs, the prospect, composed as it is of these enchanting and sublime objects, changes at every step, and presents them blended with, or divided from, each other, in every possible variety which can gratify the eye and the imagination. When a piece of scenery so beautiful, yet so varied,—so exciting by its intricacy, and yet so sublime,—is lighted up by the tints of morning or evening, and displays all that variety of shadowy depth, exchanged with partial brilliancy, which gives character even to the tamest of landscapes, the effect approaches near to enchantment. This path used to be my favourite evening and morning resort, when engaged with a favourite author or new subject of study."

XIV

The title of *Old Mortality* is taken from the nickname of one Robert Paterson who, towards the end of the eighteenth century, wandered around Scotland cleaning and repairing the tombs of those Covenanters who took up arms for their religious opinions in the reign of James II. The story is based on the anecdotes told by this supporter of their cause. It covers the period from which military operations were undertaken against them under John Grahame of Claverhouse in 1679 to the more peaceable days of William III.

The romance is concerned with the doings of Henry Morton of Milnwood, a young man of high courage and moderate Presbyterianism who, at the outset of the tale, is arrested by the dragoons of Claverhouse for having harboured an old friend of his father, the fanatical Covenanter, John Balfour of Burley, not knowing that this man had just taken part in the assassination of the Archbishop of St. Andrews. Morton narrowly escapes execution and this threat to his life, coupled with a sense of his countrymen's sufferings, induces him, little as he shares their extreme religious opinions, to throw in his lot with the Covenanters who have taken up arms for the cause of religious freedom. He accordingly becomes one of their leaders. This brings him into violent antagonism with Lady Margaret Bellenden, the royalist owner of Tillietudlem Castle, with whose granddaughter Edith he is in love. It is to the latter's intervention with Lord Evandale, one of Claverhouse's officers and Morton's rival for the hand of Edith, that Morton owes his life when first brought before Claverhouse. This act of generosity on Evandale's part is repaid by Morton at the skirmish of

Drumclog and again when the rebel forces under Burley have almost reduced Tillietudlem to surrender and have captured Evandale himself. Morton thus retains his place in Edith's heart. But the final defeat of the Covenanters at Bothwell Bridge and his own capture and banishment sever him for years from Edith, who believes him dead, and she is about to yield to the patient suit of Evandale when Morton, after the accession of William III, returns to England. His arrival puts an end to all marriage preparations. Evandale, in spite of the efforts of Morton to save him, is killed in a skirmish with a few fanatics, and Morton marries Edith. The story includes an interesting study of the character of Claverhouse and a vivid picture of the follies to which religious enthusiasm carried the Covenanters.

The Antiquary (1815), Scott's "chief favourite among all his novels," is concerned with Major Neville, a gallant young officer over whose life hangs the stain of bastardy. He falls in love with Isabella Wardour who, in deference to her father's prejudices, repulses him. Under the assumed name of Lovel, he follows her to Scotland and falls in by the way with Jonathan Oldbuck, Laird of Monkbarns, a learned and gracious antiquary and a neighbour of Sir Arthur Wardour. Lovel has occasion to save both the Wardours' lives at peril of his own, fights a duel with Oldbuck's impetuous nephew and saves Sir Arthur from the impositions of the German charlatan Dousterswivel. Finally Neville turns out to be son and heir of the Earl of Glenallan and all ends happily. The charm of the book lies in the antiquary (a friend of boyhood, George Constable) in whom we may recognise characteristics of Scott himself, as we also may in old Edie Ochiltree, king's bedesman, the man who helps to rout Dousterswivel.

XV

In between the novels just described we have seen that other novels put in an appearance—novels so unlike them as to provoke even Scott's greatest admirers to think that there was something curiously uneven about his work as a whole and from time to time to complain and ask why he wrote as he did. Quite humorously, but without giving himself away, Sir Walter countered all their criticisms and objections. Personifying his critics in Captain Clutterbuck, he caused this retired officer to tell the eidolon of the author of *Waverley* that in his opinion "a novel should commence strikingly, proceed naturally and happily, widening and deepening in interest as it flows on." The eidolon protests that if he had to think of all those things he would be "chin-deep in the grave before he had done with his task," and in the meanwhile all the quirks and quiddities which he might have devised for the reader's amusement would be "rotting in his gizzard like Sancho's suppressed witticisms." Whereupon the Captain says, "Then, Sir, you would agree with Bayes, 'What the devil does a plot signify except to bring in fine things?'"

The eidolon explains that he does his best to plan every chapter out beforehand, but to quote his very words, "I think a demon sits himself on the feather of my pen when I begin to write and leads it astray from its purpose. Characters expand under my hand ; incidents are multiplied ; the story lingers while the materials increase ; my regular mansion turns out to be a Gothic anomaly, and the work is closed before I attain the point I proposed."

So much for Scott's self-revelation, at the age of fifty-one,

in his introduction to *The Fortunes of Nigel*. Let us return, for one moment, to the Scott of eighteen summers, who was writing so confidently to "Jessie of Kelso" about his enormous literary output. Once a writer always a writer ! and in the sixteen years that elapsed between 1789 and 1805, the date of the publication of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, he must have covered reams and reams of paper with the neat handwriting which he had standardised by copying legal documents at threepence a folio in his father's office. Another nine years passed before he ventured to publish a novel. The long preparation for successful authorship was over by 1814, and it had been carried out in secret. He could at last reap the fruits of patience and assiduity.

Remarkable indeed was the brain that had engineered this career, this sapping and mining of the fortress of literary fame and, incidentally, of literary fortune, wherein nothing was left to chance. Scott planned methodically to learn how to write and equally he planned, when he had tested public opinion by the anonymous issue of *Waverley*, to give his readers as many volumes as they could be induced to absorb. He had plenty of manuscripts on hand, but it was open to doubt whether he could persuade publishers to buy two a year, and he did not want to be at the mercy of anyone's caprice or anyone's criticism. The experience of being twitted and tormented over *Rokeby* had been vastly disagreeable. In future he would print his own books, issue them anonymously in his own time and leave only their distribution in the hands of the publishers. There never was such a discreetly planned advance, and never in the whole history of literary production was there anything to compare with Sir Walter's forethought. Unfortunately the lure of Abbotsford caused him to hurry, not slowly but

quickly, towards his glittering goal, and in so doing the contriver of the great scheme over-reached himself.

Sir Walter sometimes used to say that he would never be caught "rowing against the stream." Quite definitely he had a small opinion of the value of his work and was, if anything, surprised at the influence he exerted on other writers, especially on foreigners who rushed to imitate him, for they recognised the novelty and power of his more famous novels. Dumas, Hugo, Merimée, Michaud, Ebers, Manzoni, all hastened to re-animate history according to the recipe of the Scottish lawyer. In this connection we may do well to listen to what Scott has to say. When, in 1826, the lovely ladies of Paris chirruped to him of *La Prison d'Edimbourg* and *La Fiancée de Lammermoor* he smiled on them benignly, but when a gentleman arrived with a folio in his arms and begged him to sign his name in it, he wrote, since it was a copy of Froissart, "*Voilà mon maître !*" Then he went on to explain that he had learnt many of his tricks from Froissart and Philippe de Comines, the French Tacitus ; adding modestly enough that he was no creator himself, but merely aspired to resuscitate the dead.

Most humble-minded of authors, Sir Walter, though always vexed when a book was not the success he anticipated, did not worry much about the opinion of posterity. In the most good-humoured way in the world he says of his own reputation :

"*Meliora spero.* Horace himself expected not to survive in all his works ; I may hope to live in some of mine ; *non omnis moriar.* . . . To have been read in your day, to have *had* the crown, is always something. . . . Believe me that even in the most neglected works of the present age the next may discover treasures."

The discovery that Sir Walter Scott was a persistent, never-discouraged worker, who in the beginning found words as difficult to drive as a team of zebras, is something of an encouragement to anyone who writes, for it brings the most friendly, versatile and successful of great authors into our common orbit of endeavour instead of leaving him to ride moonlike and effortless in the isolation of the heavens.

LIST OF NOVELS

<i>Waverley</i> (1814) or <i>'Tis Sixty</i>	} The author of <i>Waverley</i> .
<i>Years Since</i>	
<i>Guy Mannering</i> (1815)	
<i>The Antiquary</i> (1815)	} <i>Tales of my Landlord</i> , sold by Jedediah Cleishbotham, schoolmaster and parish clerk of Gandercleugh. J. C. said they had been composed by his assistant schoolmaster, Peter Patterson, from stories told by the landlord of the Wallace Inn, Gandercleugh.
<i>Old Mortality</i> (1816), 1st series, 4 vols.	
<i>The Black Dwarf</i> (1816)	
<i>Heart of Midlothian</i> (1818), 2nd series	
<i>Bride of Lammermoor</i> (1819), 3rd series	
<i>Legend of Montrose</i> (1819), 3rd series	
<i>Rob Roy</i> (1817)	} The author of <i>Waverley</i> .
<i>Ivanhoe</i> (written 1819, published 1820)	
<i>The Monastery</i> (1820)	} The work of Mr. Laurence Templeton.
<i>The Abbot</i> (1820)	
<i>Kenilworth</i> (1821)	} From a Benedictine manuscript.
<i>The Pirate</i> (1821)	
<i>The Fortunes of Nigel</i> (1822)	} The author of <i>Waverley</i> .
<i>Peveril of the Peak</i> (1823)	
<i>Quentin Durward</i> (1823)	
<i>St. Ronan's Well</i> (1823)	
<i>Redgauntlet</i> (1824)	
<i>The Betrothed</i> (1825)	} <i>Tales of the Crusaders</i> .
<i>The Talisman</i> (1825)	
<i>Woodstock</i> (1826)	} The author of <i>Waverley</i> .
<i>The Highland Widow</i> (1827)	
<i>The Two Drovers</i> (1827)	} <i>Chronicles of the Canongate</i> , written by Chrystal Croftangry.
<i>The Fair Maid of Perth</i> (1828)	
<i>Anne of Geierstein</i> (1829)	} The Author of <i>Waverley</i> .
<i>Count Robert of Paris</i> (1832)	
<i>Castle Dangerous</i> (1832)	} <i>Tales of my Landlord</i> , 4th series.

SOME BOOKS ABOUT SIR WALTER SCOTT

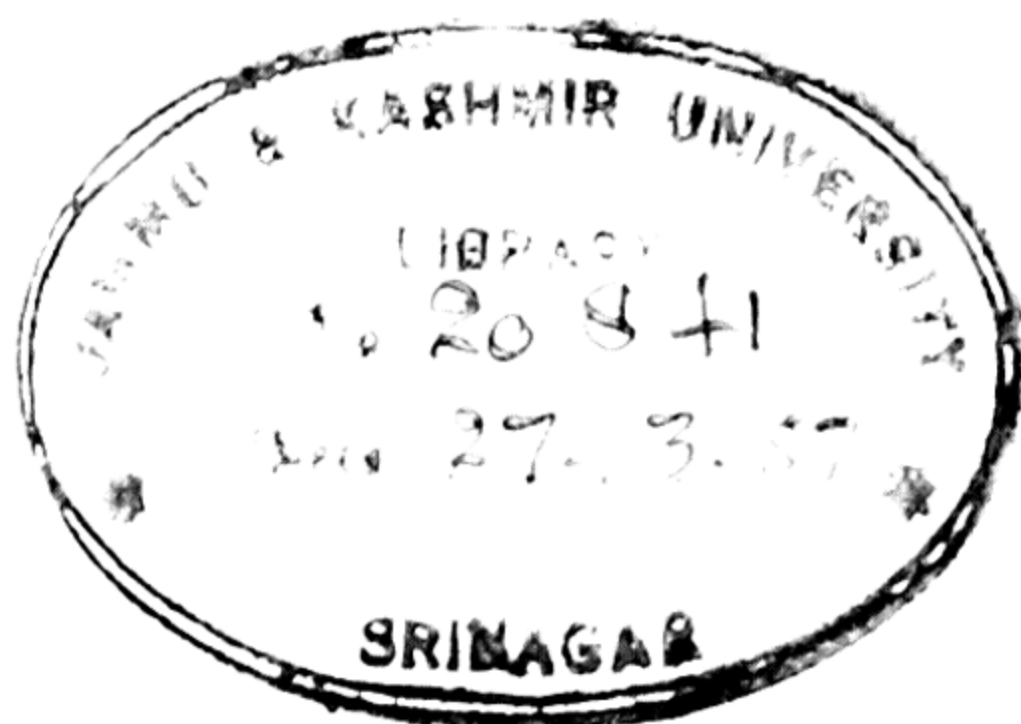
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